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## *Chapter 1*

# Darker Days Come

*L*ife is looking brighter for the Peace family!" Dad said as we were in Orlando together, celebrating New Year's. "And it's only gonna get better 'cause y'all are movin' here!"

Wait a minute. Had he said what I thought I just heard? Don't get me wrong; Orlando is pretty and all. It has its fun attractions, like Disney World and Universal Studios, which could definitely keep us occupied in a big way. I mean, who wouldn't want to live in this hugely fun city?

It was just that I had a lot going on for me back in Jacksonville. And even though I desperately wanted my family to be together, moving to Orlando wasn't the step I wanted to take at the moment. After all, I was in high school and I had a really sweet guy back at home just waiting for me to return. Besides that, I'm cool with my girlfriends too. A move like this was not something I was looking forward to at all.

As I looked over at Mom, she was smiling so hard. But I actually

thought that she would be bummed out too. She had a good job and things were getting better for her in Jacksonville. But I wasn't naïve. I knew Mom wouldn't just pick up her things and change her world on a whim. She was a strong, independent Black woman. Other than my brothers and me, Mom really had no ties to Dad anymore. They weren't married any longer and I saw no new ring on her finger. Besides, we couldn't just move in with him. Although he is our father and her ex-husband, I knew this wouldn't be God's plan. So I couldn't help but think that there was more to this story.

"So why the long faces?" Mom asked with concern as she examined the reaction she was getting from the three of us.

I hadn't even realized that York and Yancy were frowning too. I was so deep in my own gloomy thoughts that I'd never even looked over at them. But they didn't appear happy about this news either.

York called out, "We just got our basketball thing goin'." He looked like he wanted to punch the wall or something.

"Yeah, and Coach Hicks said we got a really good shot at winning state. So far, we're undefeated. Dad, why can't you just move in with us?" Yancy added.

"Plus, what's the hurry? Why are y'all movin' so fast?" York blurted out.

The questions were coming so quickly; neither of my parents had a chance to respond. At York's remark, both of them gave him a similar look like, *Boy, don't act grown on us*.

True, we weren't grown yet. We were growing teenagers in the ninth grade of high school. It was time for them to realize we weren't their little babies anymore. Having seen a lot in our fourteen years of life had helped us mature. We'd lost our older brother

to suicide. We were raised while our dad had been in jail. We'd witnessed our mom struggle to put food on the table. And we had even survived an apartment fire.

And now that things were looking up, our whole world would have to suddenly change? Why were our parents moving so fast? Just a couple of weeks ago Mom didn't even want to join in on the trip to Orlando for Christmas. Exactly what was going on here? How could she have a change of heart so quickly?

"Can I say something?" York asked cautiously, making sure he wasn't gonna get hit for his last smart-aleck comment.

Dad said, "Sure, Son, go ahead. We wanna hear from you, but do know that the decision is already made. We know we got strong-willed kids, but your mom and I don't owe y'all any explanations. You gotta understand that we know what's best for you. I know that I haven't been there much throughout you guys' lives. But I do have three and a half years left to spend with you all before you go off to college."

At that statement, York gave him a bewildered glare.

Reading his son's look, Dad went on. "Yeah, York, I know you gonna get those grades together and you're gonna go on to college too, Son. 'Cause having a male authority figure around the house is gonna help keep you straight. Now, what do you have to say?"

"I've just never been a part of anything organized like the basketball team. Now that I've gotten into it, I'm pretty good at it. I may not be as good as Jeff Jr. was, but I do wanna give it a try."

Then York took a deep breath to gather his courage; he was ready to present the rest of his case. "So I wanna stay with Uncle John for a while. And, Dad, it can't be because I like him better than you or anything like that. 'Cause that's not it. You're my dog;

you know that. It's just that he lives in Jacksonville, and he's got an extra bedroom. When I watched the kids for them one night, it was cool being over there. I just think Yancy and Yasmin should move with y'all and I should stay in Jacksonville and finish school here."

Yancy quickly protested, "Yeah, but they only have one extra room, and I think that room should be mine. I have more reason to stay in Jacksonville than York or Yas. I mean, no offense, Pops, but Uncle John has always been like a dad to me. Seriously, we've been doing a lot together over the years. It was York who never really liked him."

"Wait, I like him now!" York objected.

"Yeah, okay. Right," Yancy coolly replied. "But really, folks, listen, my grades are up to par. I'm on the honors track and basketball is taking off for me too. I should be the one to stay in Jacksonville. York and Yasmin should move to Orlando with you."

Dad just listened and turned to me. "Yas, I know you have somethin' to say."

I was fuming with anger. Was it finally my turn? How dare they? My brothers just felt so sure that I needed to be the one to move. I was doing everything in my power to hold back the tears. Yes, I was happy for my parents. They were trying to work it out, trying to make us a family again. Besides, I had no doubt that they would do it God's way. That meant wedding bells would be in their plans soon enough.

But even though they hadn't told us everything, I couldn't spoil their plans by wanting things my own way. I just felt like, of all the people, I should be the one to stay in Jacksonville. It just seemed too selfish to express my true feelings, so I didn't say anything.

In my silence, Mom spoke up. "Obviously, she's fine with it since she has nothin' to say. I'm sure she's gonna miss her friends and school, but she'll be okay. That's the problem nowadays. Kids get too many choices in this world. The decision has been made and we're all gonna move. None of y'all are stayin' in Jacksonville. The plan your dad and I have is for the three kids we have left to be a family—all under one roof. And if your dad has to be in Orlando to land the job that's he's been workin' on gettin', then this is where we'll all be when that time comes." Mom flatly put it all out there; she didn't leave any room for changing her mind.

York was furious. "Wow, Mom! How you gonna just forget what we want like we ain't got no say in it? I mean, when is this move supposed to be happenin' anyway? You were the one who encouraged us to get involved in basketball in the first place. So now we've done it, and we're gettin' good at it. But you just wanna pull that away from us?"

She just shook her head and said, "You'd better watch your mouth, boy."

"I'm just sayin', Ma," York responded, trying to persuade her to see it his way.

"It's not what you say, Son. It's how you say it," Dad cut in, motioning for him to calm down.

York just grabbed his jacket and stormed out of the hotel room. I wanted to join him. And looking over at Yancy, he did too. We both knew that York had a tougher spirit, and he was bold enough to pull a move like that.

"York, you'd better get back in here!" Mom yelled.

I screamed to myself, *Run, York, run for me!*

"Let him go," Dad said. "Yancy, go and check on your brother."

Then he told Mom, “The boys need to go and cool down.”

“Yeah, well, I need to cool down too,” she said as she headed toward the door. Before she went out, she looked over at me. “They’re gonna come around, though; they’ll be okay with our decision like you are, Yasmin.” She really thought that I was on board with the whole thing, and I hadn’t given her any reason not to.

As she walked out leaving Dad and me alone, I couldn’t help feeling extremely sad. *But, Mom, I’m not okay with this*, I silently confessed as the tears rolled down my face.

In those few minutes after she left, Dad and I didn’t speak. He turned on the TV, and I went outside in the darkness. When I found my brothers sitting on a nearby bench, I sat next to them. The three of us said nothing to one another, but we all felt the same unhappiness. We just looked up at the sky. It was very clear that our world was changing and we were unable to control what was about to happen.



Three days later we had said good-bye to Dad and were back in Jacksonville. I wasn’t sure when we’d see him again, so the huge hug we shared would have to last for a while.

On the day of the basketball tournament, we were at the school gymnasium. This was a big chance for my brothers and they were all geeked about it.

“It just seems so weird,” Veida said to me as we sat with my other two crazy best buds. “Why your parents gonna move y’all like that? How am I gonna live without seeing your fine brothers every day?”

“Now . . . you wrong for that,” Perlicia scolded her. “Neither

York or Yancy are thinkin' about you; trust me. You should be thinkin' about missin' your friend and here you are talkin' about some boys. You're a hot mess, girl."

"No, no. Yas, don't get me wrong. I'm gonna miss you. Seriously. All of this stuff I've been goin' through with my parents not gettin' along and my sister trippin', I wouldn't have been able to manage if I didn't have you to call and talk to."

Turning the attention away from herself, Veida continued. "And speaking of boys, these two chicks over here got some new love interests. They keep talkin' about it, but they won't spill the details." She motioned to Asia and Perlicia.

"What? I was only gone for a minute! What boys y'all got?" I asked in complete surprise.

"Veida doesn't know what she's talkin' about," Asia responded, dismissing my question and the subject.

My three friends looked so cute in their Trojanette outfits. Their short skirts and color-coordinated tops really made them stand out from me. I hated so badly that I didn't make the squad with them, but I was proud to see them dance during halftime. My girls knew they were the bomb. I was just glad that they still wanted to sit with me.

"So," Veida started. "Does Myrek even know yet?" She scooted closer to get the scoop.

Her question made me get emotional again. Myrek wasn't just another boyfriend. We'd been friends for years. And every time either one of us wanted to break up, our friendship drew us back together again. How could I tell him that I had to move?

There was still no set date as to when we were leaving. And I didn't want breaking the news to him to make him doubt my

feelings. So I hadn't told him yet because I was afraid of how he would react. Besides, if he was gonna be okay with us having a long-distance relationship, then I would be mad. 'Cause if that was the case, then he really didn't care as much as I thought he did. Just thinking about it all was too hard to bear. It seemed like I couldn't win either way.

"I just hope they don't move y'all before we go to state because these boys are on the case!" Veida said, jumping to her feet when Myrek made a basket.

"Well, they ain't so on-point right now," Asia added. "Look at the score. We're goin' into halftime with us twenty points down."

"Hey, Yas. There's your mom," Veida said. I looked up in surprise and saw my mother headed to a seat two sections down.

In fact, I was really shocked. What was she doing here? She was supposed to be at work until 6 p.m., so Myrek's dad was going to take us home. Seeing her show up for the game, even though my brothers would be excited about it, made me hope everything was okay.

*This is strange*, I thought. "I'll be back, y'all," I said to them as I got up.

"Well, we gotta go and get ready for the fourth-quarter short dance. We'll see you when we get back," Veida said.

"She knows we're gettin' ready to perform. You don't have to rub it in," Perlicia reprimanded.

Veida shot back. "I know she knows. I was just remindin' her that we should be here by the time she comes back. Back off, Perlicia!"

"It's okay, girls. Go out there and do your thing," I told them.

As I headed over to see my mom, the three of them went to join the other dancers. I had to keep my own feelings in check so

that the green-eyed monster wouldn't pop up and step into my business. I was happy for my girls; we were true friends. I only hoped when I moved to Orlando that I would have friends just as caring. It took a lot for us to become tight buddies. Now I truly believed that we wouldn't intentionally deceive each other—and that just felt so great.

Even so, I couldn't help but wonder. Would it be possible to have meaningful friendships with some new girls? Or have I found something that I would never be able to replace? Then again, how could my parents do this to me? I never had good girlfriends until now, and they knew that. It made me angrier with each step I took toward my mom.

When I approached her, I just blurted out, "Why aren't you at work?" It sounded so cold even to me. I just couldn't keep my feelings in.

"Because I'm here. And watch your tone!" she snapped back. "Look, Yasmin, I know you've been avoiding me. You've been stayin' in your room, having your head stuck in some book, or talkin' on the phone with your little friends. But we need to talk about this. Your dad and I are tryin' not to move until the end of the semester, but we may have to move sooner. It all depends on what happens with this job he's tryin' to get. Life changes and you might not like it, but you've gotta be able to roll with it and adjust to survive."

"All right, Mom." I said whatever I could just so she could stop talking about the move. Right now the attention needed to be on my brothers' game.

"Look at 'em," she said with a frustrated tone. "Your brothers are gettin' beat down bad. Pick up the game, boy!" she yelled out. "York, get the rebound! Hey, Coach, you need to get Yancy up off

the bench and maybe y'all would do better!" she shouted.

"Mom!" I said, feeling embarrassed and wanting her to calm down.

"I'm just tellin' the truth."

When the game was over, our team didn't win. Myrek and my brothers were really upset. Mom went to my brothers and tried to give them pointers. But neither of them wanted to hear it. It's like she was mad at all of us for being mad about moving. And her over-the-top frustration was getting the best of her.

When he didn't come up to me, I went over to Myrek. Trying to cheer him up, I said, "It's okay. You'll get 'em next time."

"Yeah, but will you even be here to see it?"

I couldn't believe this! One of my brothers, I didn't know which one, had opened his big mouth. We all agreed that I'd be the one to tell Myrek about us moving.

All I could say to him was, "I didn't wanna talk about it, Myrek. I didn't wanna bring it up because it makes me mad. I don't wanna move. Okay? And no matter what you say about the situation, it's gonna hurt my feelings."

"I don't understand. What do you mean?" Myrek asked me, wiping the sweat from his brow.

I tried to explain the way I felt. "If you tell me you'll miss me, then I'll be sad. If you tell me that it's gonna be okay because life goes on and we're too young to have anything serious anyway, then I'm gonna be bummed out too. Nothin' you say is gonna make me feel better about this move."

Then he grabbed my hand, and I saw his eyes beginning to tear up. "I don't need to *say* anything. Can't you tell by my face how I feel about you movin' away?"

As a tear, mixed with the sweat already on his face, dropped from his eye, I knew that he was bummed out too. I'm sure some of it had to do with them losing the game and with him missing some free throws. But why in the world did I have to have such bad news?

*Lord, I thought, please fix this. I can't stand anything else clobbering my world down.*



I was so glad when classes finally started. I needed to get away from all the tension that was going on in my home. Mom was into planning her future, so she was preoccupied. There were boxes all around the apartment as we prepared to move. My brothers were tied up with their basketball practice and actually getting along for a change. They didn't have time to hang out with me. So, for the most part, I was left alone with my thoughts. But I knew school would keep me occupied until it was time for me to leave.

I had just left the counselor's office after getting my new schedule when I bumped into someone. I looked up and couldn't help but stare. This new guy was cute. We just laughed at our slight collision.

"I'm sorry. I'm so clumsy," he said in the most polite manner I've ever seen on a ninth-grade boy.

I could see the developing muscles poking from under his sweater. But I had to stop staring before people reported back to Myrek that I was looking at this kid a little too hard.

"So, you're new here, huh?" I asked. "I haven't seen you around before."

"Yeah, I'm the new kid on the block."

"Where did you come from?" I asked.

"Pensacola. This school is a lot bigger than my old one. I'm tryin' not to get lost."

I replied, "Let me see your schedule. I'm just a freshman but I know my way around."

"I'm a freshman too," he said.

But I knew that already by how young he looked. I asked him where he lived. It couldn't be too far from me since we attended the same school. When he said the name of his apartment complex, I sort of laughed.

"What's wrong?" He went on, "I mean, I know I don't live in the nicest area, but please fill me in. What goes on around there? Are we gonna be robbed left and right? What? Talk to me."

I explained. "Yeah, well, I live in the neighborhood next to yours. You know how it is—kids not liking each other because they live on opposite sides of the street."

"I mean, I'm not in any gang or anything like that. Plus, I don't like being around trouble," he told me.

This guy was pretty smooth and I like how he complimented my style. I kept telling myself, *You have a boyfriend!* But there was nothin' wrong with me being friends with him, right? I just showed him around and he was so appreciative.

"You don't have to thank me anymore," I said to him after he must have thanked me a dozen times.

"Yes, I do. It's not easy being the new kid. But if everyone here is as nice as you are, then I'm gonna like it here."

Before I could get his name, Asia and Perlicia came up on both sides of me, put their arms in mine, and tugged me away. "Y'all, I was talkin'. Don't be rude."

"Well, it looks like you're gettin' too close to me, all caught up,

or whatever. Don't you know if Myrek walked down this hall right now he would be furious?" Asia whispered in my ear.

"He's a new student and I'm tryin' to show him the way around. We're just doing what friends do." I didn't want to sound too defensive.

"You just met him. How could y'all possibly be friends?" Perlicia said, rolling her eyes.

"Whatever. You two are being silly."

The day flew right past me. At lunchtime my girls were nowhere to be found and it looked like we had different lunch periods. I was so bummed out. Who was I gonna talk to? Who was I gonna hang with? And then it dawned on me that I could chill with my new friend. Funny, I didn't even know his name. But just then I saw him across the room.

Actually, I heard him too because he was sort of being loud. I didn't realize right away that he was saying some bogus things to the folks around him. Thinking he would recognize me from earlier, I just went up to him and smiled.

"What you lookin' at?" he asked in a harsh tone.

It sounded strange and I didn't know how to respond because it seemed like he meant it. I couldn't walk away because he was standing right in front of me. People had started laughing and none of this felt good.

"I said, what you lookin' at? I don't know you," he snarled.

How could he play me like that? Earlier I had shown him to his class and gave him a preview of the school. He was cool then and over-the-top nice. What had gone on in a matter of hours?

But I wasn't about to hold back. "Don't act like you don't know me. If you don't wanna be friends, that's all you have to say. I just

came over here to see if you wanted to eat lunch with me.”

“Whoa! Pensacola ain’t got nothin’ on y’all Jacksonville girls. Y’all are straight. What, you gonna buy my lunch too?” he said while sliding closer to me in a sleazy kind of way.

Tugging away, I said, “Please, just back up off of me!”

“What’s going on?” Myrek asked. He came over to us with concern all over his face.

“I’m tryin’ to get my rap on. Why is it any of yo’ business?” The guy I had sorely misjudged was saying this to my boyfriend.

Myrek immediately got tough. “You don’t need to get your rap on with her. Just step off so we won’t have no trouble.”

“Myrek, it’s okay. Let’s just go,” I said, pulling my guy back.

“No, no. Bring your man back over here. Tell him how you were all over me, askin’ me to eat lunch with you.”

Myrek looked at me. “What? What is he talkin’ about?”

I was so humiliated! I felt like I’d been punked. Why couldn’t I just be satisfied with my own boyfriend? No, I had to be lured in by some charm and a smile. Now look where it got me. Myrek and I had been in a great place in our relationship. He trusted me and I trusted him. But I had gone and messed it all up.

It felt like the sun had suddenly gone away and grey clouds had taken its place. I knew that I had disappointed Myrek. He just walked away, shaking his head. The guy was rude and spiteful; he just stood there laughing in my face.

I ran straight to the girls’ restroom and cried. With my head against the stall, I prayed, *Lord, why do things have to be so down for me? Why do only darker days come?*

## *Chapter 2*

# Holder of Pain

*W*ait, Myrek, please, let me explain!" I called out. Lunch period hadn't ended yet, but I had taken a few minutes to dry my eyes and pull myself together. When I stepped into the hallway, he was just leaving the cafeteria after that embarrassing scene. Ignoring me, he headed down the hallway. It didn't take long for me to realize that he didn't want to talk to me.

When I caught up with him, he hurt my feelings even more. "What, Yas, what do you want? I'm tryin' to go to class. Go on and leave me alone!"

"Can't we just talk? I want to explain," I pleaded.

"I ain't tryin' to hear it. That new dude told me everything I needed to know. You're not happy with us?"

"That's not it at all. Seriously, Myrek."

Just as he was about to walk away, the first bell rang. Myrek raised his voice to speak over the loud noise, "We'll talk about all

this later. You're movin' anyway. Maybe I'm the one takin' this relationship thing too deep."

Myrek walked down the hall as Veida came up beside me and asked, "What's going on with you and Myrek?"

"Why does somethin' have to be going on with us?"

"You know that brother never rushes to get away from you. Now he's shoutin' at you in the hallway. And that look on his face seems like real trouble."

I sighed and followed her over to the lockers. I just laid my head on hers. Unfortunately, she was mostly right about what she had just witnessed.

"Don't worry about it. You break up with him and there are plenty more fish in the sea. Ooh, speaking of new fish. Girl, there's this new guy in my class. He is so cute and so nice," Veida gushed.

"Been there, done that. Please talk about somethin' else," I urged as I stood up straight.

"No, you ain't seen this boy yet because, if you had, you wouldn't be wantin' to change the subject so quickly. Maybe that's what Myrek's problem is. He needs to see that you are too cute and you don't have to wait around on him. If he's actin' crazy, you can get somebody else. And just maybe I need to make your brothers turn their heads toward me again."

What was this girl talking about? "What has this got to do with my brothers, Veida? And how could that help me?" I asked her in frustration. I just wanted to be real and have her be honest with me too. "You said you messed up by liking both of them, but for the last week or two you been talkin' about both of them again. I thought it was Yancy you were all excited over. What is up with you?"

"It was, until York got me a little somethin' for Christmas," she said with a silly smile on her face.

"What?" I asked her with surprise in my voice. This was the first time I'd heard about any of that.

"Remember when we sent out those candy cane grams before the holidays?" She reminded me of that fun project.

"You mean those little fifty-cent messages? That's what you're talkin' about? Please . . . he sent out a ton of those things."

"I doubt it," she replied. She totally didn't want to believe me.

"And I don't know; he's got it goin' on now. He's not being so abrasive anymore, and he's hangin' with the right crowd. You know, my heart broke with everything that happened to Bone. I learned my lesson; I'm not going to go back and forth. I'm just sayin' maybe I need your help to get York jealous." Veida was rambling and making no sense.

"Speaking of the guilty," I said as I saw both my brothers coming down the hall with Perlicia and Asia. They were all laughing and having fun.

Veida started primping. She couldn't even tell that my brothers weren't giving her any attention. They were so into being silly and having fun—chasing girls seemed to be the last thing on their minds. But that didn't stop Asia and Perlicia from hanging on to their every word; they couldn't stop laughing.

I finally asked them, "What is so funny? What do my brothers have y'all all giddy about?"

"They're hilarious; you know your brothers," Perlicia commented.

"The new boy thought he had game," Asia spilled and told.

"Your brothers just got him in check, so he won't be messin'

with you no more,” Perlicia explained as my brothers strolled away without saying a word to me.

“Why would they go off on the new guy?” Veida asked. “He’s so nice, shy almost.”

“No, he ain’t. He’s a loudmouth jerk,” Asia said, looking at Veida like she’d totally misjudged the boy.

All of a sudden, the new guy walked over and started acting nice again. Who did he think he was? If it were up to me, I would tell his parents to get him the serious help this kid needed.

“Hey, I didn’t catch your name earlier,” he said, sounding all sweet.

“That’s because I didn’t give it to you,” I replied as mean as I could.

Then he had the nerve to say, “I’m sorry, did I do something wrong?”

“Yeah, you did something wrong,” Perlicia said as she stepped up in his face. “Havin’ your hands all over me and dissin’ my girl in the cafeteria is totally bogus.”

“Girls, girls, I think you got the wrong one,” Veida interrupted.

She just kept saying it until finally we turned around. Both Perlicia and I were stunned to see the identical face in a very similar body; even their denim shirts were similar. There were two of them? Twins!

We were all surprised at this news and the mystery was solved. The two of them were standing there together, looking so much alike, but as different as night and day. One of them was nice and kind and the other was just the opposite. The one who was hard and ghetto-acting said to the other, “The ladies are mad at you

because of me.” Then he turned on us and said, “I see none of y’all got your little men around, the little sissy wimps.”

“Lee, get on out of here, man,” one brother said to the other. Then he turned to me and said, “I should have known he was the reason you were being so weird to me. You thought I was him.” Obviously, the one I met earlier was speaking to me.

Some other guys came around talking loud and being playful. I saw Lee pull one of them away, saying something crazy to the boy.

I was so embarrassed! After bashing such a sweet guy, I find out he has an evil twin! “Why didn’t you tell me you had a twin?” I asked.

“I mean, the bell rang. We had to go to class. I didn’t even have time to tell you my name. I’m Billy. And I apologize if my brother was rude to you. By the way, I don’t know where my last class is; I was hoping you could show me.”

I told my girls I would catch up with them later and the two of us started walking down the hall. Suddenly, Myrek came out of his class. I guess he left something in his locker. He walked right into us.

“You done with him, huh?” Myrek said to me, huffing and puffing.

“No, no. This is Billy, he’s the guy I met earlier today. The dude at lunch is his twin brother. I’m tryin’ to tell you they are two entirely different people. Now it all makes sense; one is so mean and nowhere near as cool as this guy right here,” I said, pointing to Billy.

Myrek wasn’t interested in my explanation. He grunted, “So you playin’ hostess now? You look mighty comfortable walkin’ down the hall with this dude.”

“Oh, it’s nothin’ like that. She’s just showing me to my class,” Billy said as he held out his hand.

Myrek didn’t shake it. “She can show you wherever, homey. Mean twin, nice twin, I’m done.”

He slammed his locker shut, rolled his eyes at me, and left. I knew he was mad, but I was actually glad that I hadn’t misjudged the cool boy I met earlier in the day after all. Twins! Wow. They couldn’t be any more different.

“Sorry,” Billy said to me. “I can see you really care about him.”

We walked a little further, and I motioned to him that we had approached his classroom. “I do care about him; we’ve been friends forever. Hopefully, he’ll calm down soon. Myrek’s real levelheaded. Well, see you around school,” I said and kept walking. I had to pick up the pace, class was getting ready to begin and the final bell was about to ring.

Myrek had never rolled his eyes at me. The more I thought about it the more I knew he was hurting. Actually, if we broke up I’d be hurting too. I turned the corner and hurried to my class. I couldn’t help but wonder how God could make us whole again—now that my great relationship had been crushed.



On the way home from school I was still thinking about how Myrek and me could patch things up. I needed to be alone with my thoughts so I took the long route home from the school bus.

I didn’t even make it around the corner before I heard a lot of loud talking and familiar voices. It sounded like my brothers and my girls. After cutting up in school earlier, what were they up to now?

Then I heard Perlicia say, "Stop, York! I already gave you one kiss. I'm not givin' you another one." Wait a minute; was she flirting with my brother?

Then Asia said to Yancy, "Let's give them some privacy."

Before I could confirm what my mind thought was going on, Myrek and I met up with each other. He must have already forgiven me because he called out in a friendly voice and said, "Yas! I was thinking about you. Looks like we're having a party! Come here, give me a hug."

"I'm stressed right now, okay? I don't know what's happening to us and it's starting to make me crazy." Having said that, I pushed past him and kept walking.

After realizing he couldn't prevent what was about to happen, he called after me, "Hey, I've got some news for you. There's something I think you should know. Your brothers have been out here entertaining your friends."

When my boyfriend blurted that out, he saw the way I was looking. I wasn't happy with that news at all. The last time my brothers got involved with one of my friends it was horrible. It was hard to believe that Perlicia and Asia would be talking to York and Yancy and didn't even share any of that with me.

I dashed around the corner and was shocked to see Perlicia and York hugged up by Myrek's dad's car. Yancy and Asia were kissing. The sight of them stopped me dead in my tracks.

"What are y'all doing!" I yelled to the top of my lungs as I saw my best friends huddled up with my brothers.

The two couples quickly pulled apart. As my whole body filled with anger, I knew this was so wrong on so many levels. Seeing my girlfriends betray their friend by being with my brothers, I wondered

if I hadn't come along how far this would've gone. Even though we were ninth graders and thought we were practically grown—we weren't.

Myrek pulled at my arm; he wasn't exactly thrilled with my reaction to this situation. "You need to stay out of people's business."

"Yeah, and take my sister somewhere, man. She's ruinin' the party," York added.

Yancy said, "Yeah, Yas. Your girls don't need your permission. We got 'em."

I dismissed all three of them and turned my attention to my friends. "Asia, Perlicia, I wanna see y'all now!"

"Your brothers just told you we're straight," Asia said.

"Yeah, girl," Perlicia called out with her hands on her hips. "We only got thirty minutes before we have to be at Asia's house. Can we just have a little fun, please?"

She moved in closer and kissed York on the cheek. Asia took her cue from Perlicia and went back to cuddling up with Yancy.

I had so many questions. What about me? And what would Veida think? What about what these girls really deserved? What about what God wants? I'm supposed to be my brothers' keeper and my business was their business.

Then to make matters worse, I could look in Myrek's eyes and tell that he didn't have a problem with any of this. This was definitely a problem for me.

York wouldn't give up. "Myrek, man, handle my sister before she gets her feelings hurt," he called out.

"Come on, I wanna talk to you anyway. I just wanna hang out with my girlfriend. And I wanna apologize for being a jealous jerk.

Why are you so into stopping them instead of worrying about your own relationship?"

"This isn't about us right now, Myrek," I turned to him and said. "I'm not cool with this. And it doesn't mean that I don't want to hang out with you."

Myrek's answer surprised me. "And it doesn't mean that your brothers need you all in their business."

When he said that, it made me think really hard. Yes, I was trying to look out for my brothers, but I knew how much they cared about me too. And although they didn't want me to stop their game, how would they like it if I started mine up? I wanted them to think about it too, so I turned my back to them and started play-acting.

I wrapped my arms around Myrek and said, "Okay, Myrek, you're right. Let's have some fun. Give me a kiss!" I was trying to be as convincing as I could.

Myrek, of course, was willing to go along with me. And, just as I thought, it wasn't long before Yancy and York came running and pulled the two of us apart.

"What are y'all doin' over here?" York said to us.

Myrek couldn't even get a word in edgewise. York let him have it first. "Man, that's my sister. You can't do that with her!"

Yancy let my boyfriend know how upset it made him too. "Yeah, man. What's up with you? What you tryin' to do?"

I was right! It was like they had a double standard. What was okay for them was not okay for me. I looked over at my two girlfriends. I wanted Asia and Perlicia to understand why my brothers were against me and my boyfriend doing exactly the same thing that they were doing with York and Yancy. They didn't seem to get

it, but now was not the time for them to go all the way with any boys.

As the three guys stood there arguing, I pulled my girlfriends over by a tree. They needed to come to their senses quick!

“Do y’all see how stupid it is to give it up to my brothers? Don’t you see that in the back of their heads they don’t think it’s cool? Don’t you think they should treat their girls like they want their own sister to be treated? Or do you think that they should be dog-gish and take what they want when it’s being served to them on a silver platter? Doesn’t it make sense for them to step back and do what’s best for y’all?”

“Oh, Yasmin, you just need to get with it,” Perlicia complained. “We’re not hurtin’ anybody; we’re just havin’ a little fun.”

“Yeah,” said Asia. “Just because you can’t handle it doesn’t mean we can’t. People do mature at different stages in their lives.”

“Mature? There’s a baby in my family right now. You know; the one Myrek’s sister had with my brother when they were in high school. Jada can’t even take care of her own baby. Since she wasn’t ready for the responsibility, that little girl now belongs to somebody else. You’ve got to be kiddin’ me, Asia. There’s nothin’ mature about what y’all are tryin’ to do.”

Maybe it was wrong for me to feel betrayed, but that’s how I felt. Why do my girls think this is acceptable? Why are they choosing to be with my brothers over the friendship we have? And adding to the mix how Veida feels about my brothers—everything about this arrangement was wrong. And it hurt.

Something in my communication with people wasn’t right because it seemed like the folks that I thought I could trust—I couldn’t. And the hurtful things people thought they could do to me were

wrong too. I was going to tell my girls *and* my brothers what I thought. I was going to let them have a piece of my mind.

Myrek looked so disappointed in me. I could tell he was crushed that I wasn't trying to cuddle up with him like that. But we had a different kind of relationship and he knew it. Even though I cared about him so much, I just didn't want it to be physical. I knew me and him would have a lot to talk about later on.

He was going to have to understand that I didn't care about what anybody else did. Our relationship was going to please God. He also needed to know that he couldn't be mad at me one day and overly nice the next. I was tired of being hurt; I was tired of being left out. No more was I going to be a holder of pain.