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Finding Your Faith

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Enjoying True Peace

Finding Your Faith

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Yasmin Peace Series Book 1

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Chapter 1

Prayer Does Work

*G*et out! Me and my kids need some space. I'm sick of everybody trying to console us. Leave us alone." My mom was screaming at the thirty or so friends and family members that came to offer their condolences after the funeral of my oldest brother, Jeffery Jr. Everybody called him Jeff.

Everyone stopped and looked at her. However, no one moved or walked toward the door. The tension was thicker than a plump, round turkey on Thanksgiving.

"Mom, here. Have some tea," I said, trying to soothe her.

She knocked the cup from my hand sending it flying across the room. I'd never seen my mother this way.

Mom went over to the front door, opened it, and said, "Yasmin, York, Yancy, and I are going to have to find a way to deal with this. My husband is down in Orlando in jail, while we're up here in Jacksonville grieving over the loss of my oldest baby. I just don't need no busybodies coming up in here poking around. I know that most

of you mean well, but right now we just need to be left alone.”

Everyone quickly scurried to pick up their belongings, except my Uncle John. He was my dad’s younger brother. Mom’s steaming red eyes followed my uncle. He went over to my brother Yancy.

Uncle John put his hand on Yancy’s shoulder and said, “Son, I need you to step up and be the man.”

Yancy looked at my uncle with sad eyes and said, “Okay, Uncle John.”

My mom yelled to my uncle, “If your brother had been the man, then my boys wouldn’t be under so much pressure!”

“Yvette, come on now, girl. I’m just trying to do my brother’s part and look out for y’all.”

“John, if your brother wasn’t locked up he could do his own part. Like I said, I’m tired and I just need you to leave.”

“Okay, okay, Yvette,” Uncle John said as he headed toward the door. “Remember, I’m only one phone call away.”

As soon as Uncle John had closed the door, my brother Yancy blurted out, “I wish I could go and live with Uncle John!”

“Boy, if you don’t go sit down somewhere . . .” my mother said.

My brothers went to their room while my mom went to the bedroom that she and I shared. I couldn’t bear to sit inside our cramped apartment for one more second, so I went and sat on the porch.

It had been a week since my brother had taken his own life. Though things weren’t perfect before Jeff’s death, we had a lot of good times. We were a normal family. Now, I didn’t know what we had become.

A new school year was about to begin in a couple of days and Jeff had so much going for himself. He would’ve started his senior

year in high school—a highly recruited basketball player, one of the best in the state of Florida. All the girls liked him, but he had a strong thing going for our next-door neighbor Jada. Her brother, Myrek, was my good friend.

York, Yancy, and Yasmin. The triplets. People always asked, “What are the triplets up to? How are the triplets doing in school?” I hated being referred to as if we didn’t have names and different personalities. All of us are unique, but one thing we had in common was that we all looked up to Jeff. I had no clue how we’d survive without him. I hadn’t shed a tear during this whole chaotic week. My mom cried enough for all of us. York had become so angry that he was just looking for a way to relieve the craziness. Yancy was withdrawn and walked around in a daze.

Was I supposed to be the one to keep us all together? How could I? I was only a mere thirteen-year-old, headed to the eighth grade. I wasn’t anywhere close to being an adult. What did I know about how to make things right? We hardly ever went to church; but my grandma, or Big Mama, as my brothers and I called her, had taught us that we should pray and have faith no matter how bad things looked.

I wanted to believe deep down in my heart that God could make this not hurt so badly. But why wasn’t He making this all better? Why couldn’t I wake up from this nightmare? I had no answers, just tons of questions.

I placed my severely aching head between my wobbly knees and finally released all my tears that I’d been holding back, and I prayed.

Lord, please help my family. We don’t know what to do or how to keep going. I want to believe the verse that Big Mama taught me about

You, which says for me to trust in You with my whole heart and not lean to what I don't understand. But it's so hard to trust when it looks so bad, God.

Just then I heard a familiar voice. It was Myrek.

Most people call me a tomboy because I would hang out with my three brothers a lot. I usually play with the neighborhood boys too, but all summer I hadn't run with them like I used to. Actually, Myrek hadn't been playing with York and Yancy as much either. He was a great basketball player like Jeff and the two of them had been on the court most of the summer. I knew he would miss my brother as much as we would.

"Yasmin, I just came out here to sit with you."

"Thanks," I said as I wiped my face.

He continued, "I really don't know what to say. But my dad says that you don't always have to find words to say when something bad happens. Sometimes you can help people by just being with them."

"I guess that's true, Myrek, because I do feel better," I said, thinking about how I was praying when he came onto the porch.

"Cool," he said.

For the next thirty minutes we didn't say a thing. We were content just sitting in silence, occasionally looking at the sky.



I used to not care that on the first day of school I didn't have the latest clothes or sport the freshest hairdo. Going to school was all about learning, not trying to be fashionable. But as an eighth grader, somehow things had changed. Somewhere along the summer the things that once didn't matter now did.

Besides, with all that I had going on, it didn't seem right that I was focusing on material things. We didn't even have money to bury my brother. My mom had reminded Yancy, York, and me about that over and over again. Getting new school clothes was totally out of the question.

Actually, it was cool for boys to wear stuff a little roughed up, but when I looked around and saw all the girls looking fly, I hated me. My jeans that were purchased in the sixth grade and the hand-me-down tennis shoes that my brothers used to sport were a mess. Also, the braids I got before school let out last May were still in my head. I didn't look cute and I didn't feel cute; in fact, everybody that looked at me with their disapproving expressions let me know that I was not cute.



“I can't believe she's coming on the first day of school looking like that,” a popular girl named Perlicia said to her girlfriend Asia. “I know they live in Jefferson Projects, but even if she went to the dollar store she would look better than she does right now.”

Both of them just laughed. I always found females to be so fake and phony. So hanging with my brothers and Myrek was enough for me. We always said what we felt and moved on after releasing any tension. We never held grudges and were just there for one another. Perlicia and Asia had fallen out of their friendship so many times that I didn't have enough fingers to count them.

A part of me wanted to turn around and slap them in their faces. But, what good would that do for me ending up in trouble on the first day of school? None. Both of them needed to go study somewhere. They were enrolled in remedial English.

Not that there was anything wrong with that. Myrek and York were going to be in the same class. However, why laugh at somebody when you have shortcomings too? I hated that people could be so cruel. Why did they have to add insult to injury and make me the laughingstock of our hall?

It went from one group of girls whispering about me to another one getting started. Though I never stared anyone in the face, I could feel them staring at me. Their laughter was getting on my nerves too. All of the talk just wore me down. As tough as I had always been, standing up to anyone who ever confronted me, at that moment I just couldn't take it. I dashed off to the closest girls' bathroom I could find, went into an empty stall, locked the door, and bawled.

I prayed, I hate my life. You're supposed to be up there protecting me, making everything better. Why is it so hard? I look a mess. I feel a mess. I don't have any friends. I can't talk to my mom; she's still grieving. Can't You help me out?

"Oh no!" I cried, realizing my monthly had just started. I could have crawled under a rock and stayed there forever. With everything going on the last couple of days I hadn't been keeping up with my cycle. Plus, this was only the fifth month. It was still new to me. Even though I had on old jeans, they were a light color. Unfortunately, as soon as I checked my pants I knew they were ruined. And the first bell had just rung. I was late for class.

Didn't You just hear me, God? I need You to help, not make it worse. What am I supposed to do now?

This must've been what Big Mama meant when she said God will direct your thoughts if you pray and ask Him. Just then, I thought about the school guidance counselor, Mrs. Newman. York

and Yancy always talked about how cute she was. I remembered last year when I saw her in the hall she told me if I ever needed anything that I could come to her office. Back then I felt like I didn't have any major problems that I couldn't handle, so I never took her up on it. Now it was a different story.

After making a bootleg pad, which my mom had taught me to do in case of an emergency, I washed up and then checked the hallway. Thankfully, I was wearing one of my brother's shirts and I took it out of my pants and pulled it all the way down. I twisted my book bag toward my back so that it covered my bottom and practically sprinted to Mrs. Newman's office.

When she saw me, she quickly came from behind her desk and said, "Come in, come in. You're Yasmin Peace, right? I planned to send a note to your homeroom teacher today requesting that you stop in to see me."

I could only nod. It was hard to find words to say. On the inside and out, I was a wreck.

"Yes, and I know I'm supposed to be in class but I just need—" Then the tears started flowing.

"I know it's tough for you right now. I am so sorry about the loss of your brother Jeff. I remember him as a student here. He was a super young man."

"Well, he's gone now. He committed suicide. So what does that matter?" I muttered.

"It matters a lot," she said without hesitation. "The memories you have of him can last a lifetime. No one can take those away."

"I just don't understand why."

"Well, that's why I am here to help you. Sometimes you guys have so much on you and it feels like it's too much for you to bear."

“I mean, why would my brother do that? He knew we loved him.”

“Well, Yasmin, that’s a very complicated matter. I can’t say for sure why your brother committed suicide. However, I can tell you that young as well as old people can feel overwhelmed—as if they have no way out of their situations. That’s why it’s important to talk to someone you can trust and not hold in what’s going on inside.”

Keeping it real, I said, “Why should I talk to you? You can’t fix the problem.” I was hurting, in need of healing, and didn’t believe that she could fix my wounded soul.

She came over and put her hand on my shoulder and said, “Listen, I may not have the solution for you or your family, but I am here for you all to support you in whatever way I can.”

“Why do you care like that?”

She gently said, “Because I’m supposed to.”

I wondered what she meant by that. “Mrs. Newman, do you believe in God? I mean . . . are you a Christian?”

“Yes, Yasmin, as a matter of fact, I am. Being a Christian doesn’t stop unpleasant things from happening to us or those we love, but we can become closer to God during those times. As a result, we become stronger. I can’t make your pain go away, but I can walk through it with you and your family. Having faith and trusting that God will work it out can be very trying. You have made the first important step by seeking help, Yasmin. I commend you for that. You are so wise. I can tell you’re more mature than most of the students in this school.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Newman,” I said, wiping the tears from my face and realizing that I did need her. I almost hated to ask the next question. “Just one more thing, Mrs. Newman—do you have any maxi pads?”

She went over to her drawer and said, “I sure do, Miss Yasmin.” Then she handed me a decorative bag with pads and other toiletries inside. “And here are some pamphlets for you to share with your family about grief. All I have left to do is write you a pass for class, and you’ll be on your way.”

Having her come to my rescue was an answered prayer. Maybe God did care about little ol’ me after all. I sure felt better.



Going home on the bus on the first day of school, Myrek sat beside me. I was in a daze looking out the window. Talking was the last thing I wanted to do.

“What’s up, Yas?” he asked. It was obvious that he had not been able to read my body language.

I wasn’t smiling. I wouldn’t even look his way. I wanted to be left alone. So I didn’t respond, hoping he would get that, but he didn’t. He asked again after butting me in the arm.

“What’s up, girl? I know you heard me.” He was just like one of my brothers; I was always able to tell him everything. So it made no sense to hold stuff back and be all self-conscious about what I was feeling.

Without thinking, I just blurted out, “Boy, can’t you see I don’t feel like talking! I don’t feel well. I’m sick of my head itching with these braids that have been in for fifty thousand years. I had an issue that made me late for my first class. Besides that, every girl in the school laughed at me today. My day was the worst first day of school ever. Any other questions?” Seems like I’d forgotten everything that Mrs. Newman had said to me earlier.

“Since when do you care about what other girls think? That’s not the Yas I know.”

“I don’t know, Myrek, that’s what’s been getting me. I don’t want to look so dumpy. The whole tomboy look is starting to get pretty old. In fact, if I owned some lipstick, I wouldn’t mind putting it on.”

“What boy you trying to look cute for?” he asked, like he cared.

I rolled my eyes at him because it wasn’t really about a boy. *Where did that comment come from? Myrek is tripping,* I thought.

Defending my reasons, I uttered, “I want to be cute for *me*. I want to have style and class. Everyone thinks Mrs. Newman is beautiful and being in her presence makes me want to feel beautiful too. She’s not uppity and nasty. She’s fly. I don’t know. Maybe I’m talking nonsense. Who wants to be cute anyway, right?”

“Oh, I think you’re the cutest girl in school.”

I couldn’t even look at him when he said that. It felt sort of weird. Was he giving me a compliment? The guy who was always giving me such a hard time, just like my brothers, was saying nice stuff. Was he just trying to make sure that I didn’t cry anymore on his watch? Like the day of the funeral when he sat out on the porch with me and talked to me like a real friend.

“It’s okay, Myrek. You don’t have to say nice things.”

“Have I ever just said anything to you? Girls that cake all of that stuff on their faces, spray too much perfume, and wear tight clothes look stupid. I don’t know; you just keep it real and I like that. You shouldn’t want to change.”

Finally, we were at our stop.

York said, “Y’all getting off or what? Get up.”

Myrek didn't move. "You heard what I said, you shouldn't want to change. You don't understand. So I'ma help you."

"Help me? How?"

Thinking he was talking crazy for real, I pushed him out of the seat. The four of us walked from the bus stop home. Myrek didn't say another word.

An hour later, I was home alone.

Yancy went to the library. He was an honor roll student and always loved school, but now he was having a hard time with being so bright. He made straight As, but lately he was cool with getting a few Bs and lots of Cs. Most of the dudes in our neighborhood and even some at school teased him for being intelligent. He tried hard not to let folks know that it got to him.

York was hanging out in the neighborhood with his new crew that wasn't about nothing. Older boys that hung out playing loud music in their hoopties, dancing in the streets, and talking trash to everybody that walked by. York was on the verge of failing and it didn't even seem to matter to him. He barely passed to the eighth grade and his teachers said that he needed to start applying himself.

Being in the house alone was a big deal. My mom worked two jobs and came in really late. Because we shared the same bed, I didn't get much space on my side. Just to lie in the bed alone was so relaxing. I saw a couple of dresses hanging on her side of the closet and wondered how they'd look on me. I hopped up, put them against me, and looked in the mirror. I longed for a new look. I wanted to look at myself and like what I saw. A knock at the door disturbed my fantasy moment.

It was Myrek. *What did he want?*

"Hey, hey. Open up," Myrek said. "My sister wants to talk to you."

Jada used to be over here constantly with Jeff. Somewhere along the summer, they fell out with each other. Jeff seemed sad after that. *Why did she want to see me though?*

“What . . . what’s going on?” I said as I opened the door.

“Okay, I’m a leave the two of you alone. I told you that I was going to help you, Yasmin,” Myrek said before dashing away.

“What is he talking about, Jada?”

She came into the house with two big suitcases. “I’m gonna give you a makeover. I owe that much to Jeffery to do that for you. Myrek was telling me that you want to be gorgeous. You don’t want to look like a tomboy. ’Bout time, girl!”

“Jada, I’m not sure if I want a makeover. I mean, I don’t want to look phony.”

“Whatever. Let’s get these braids out of your hair, slap a perm in it, and hook you up. I have tons of clothes that are going to fit you. Ooh! You are going to be so cute.”

“I don’t have any money to pay you for anything.”

“Girl, you don’t need to pay me. I like doin’ this kind of stuff. Plus, when people see how different you look, they’ll ask who did your hair and stuff. It’ll be good advertisement for me. I could make money on the side doin’ this! You’re Jeff’s sister and we’re like family. I need to do this. I loved him, you know.”

As she jerked my head to the left and to the right taking out my braids, I endured the pain with anticipation. I didn’t know how the makeover was going to turn out, but I was overjoyed about the possibility of a change. If God sent her, if this was His way of helping me, I was grateful. I certainly had put in enough requests, asking Him daily to make my life easier. I guess I had the answer to my question: Prayer does work!

Believing in Hope

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Yasmin Peace Series Book 2

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Chapter 1

Stronger Each Day

*Y*asmin, you and your brothers need to come over to my house right now,” Myrek said to me over the phone with great urgency in his voice.

“Huh? What are you talking about?” I said to my next door neighbor and best buddy of many years.

I was really confused about why he sounded panicked. My mom had just come back from Myrek’s apartment. Mr. Mike, Myrek’s dad, had asked her to come over to discuss the situation about Jada, Myrek’s sister. My brother Jeffery Jr., whom everybody called Jeff, used to date Jada. Well, now Jada says that she is pregnant—and that Jeff is the father!

Though my tough brother York wasn’t at all happy about it, my smart brother Yancy and I certainly thought this was great news. I wasn’t naïve or anything. I know that it is not God’s plan for a teenage girl to be pregnant. But because of what my grandma, Big Mama, always said could come out of a mess, I had hope that

God will bring a miracle into these circumstances. After explaining the situation to my brothers and me, Mom realized that she'd left her Bible at Myrek's house, so she went back to get it.

"Yas, please don't ask me no questions. Seriously, could y'all come on over here?" Myrek said as I heard loud talking behind him.

My mom was over there cutting up. Why though? She had just said that we needed to be prayerful and God would work everything out. It had only been months since Jeff took his own life. Just when I was getting over the fact that I would probably lose every connection I ever had with him, I find out that I will have a niece or nephew, keeping a part of Jeff in this world. What could possibly be going wrong now?

Quickly, I slid on my slippers and hung up the phone without saying bye.

I looked at York and Yancy. "Let's go. Mom's over there showing out."

"I told y'all this isn't our fight. This isn't our business," York said, not wanting to get up out of his seat. "Jada is too young to have a baby. Besides, whatever that girl wants to do with her body ain't got nothing to do with us."

"Yeah. Like Jeffery would want her to kill the baby?" Yancy said to York. "We gotta be his voice. We gotta do whatever we can to make sure she knows that she's not in this alone. So get up and let's go over there. Now!"

I couldn't believe Yancy grabbed York's collar. I knew that wasn't going to go over well. The two of them started pushing and shoving each other back and forth. It was just killing me how every five minutes they were getting into it about something.

"Guys, this isn't about us. Mom is over there fussing with

Myrek's dad. Can't we just keep whatever we feel to ourselves and go bring Mama home?"

York said, "Mama's grown. What about this don't you understand?"

"I understand that she's our mom and obviously it's a big enough deal that Myrek thought we could help by being over there. It's not like I'm putting my nose into something that I'm supposed to stay out of. We were basically asked to come over and help. If you want to sit here and do nothing, or if you two want to stay here and argue, then fine. I'll go by myself." I opened our apartment door and stood in the doorway with my body facing right.

"I'll go," York said, knowing that I made a very valid point.

The front door of Myrek's apartment was wide open.

"You just can't go around giving no demands, Yvette," Mr. Mike said to our mom. "Jada is my daughter. She's going to do what is best for her. All of us are struggling in these projects. We're barely able to take care of the kids we got now. You workin' two jobs. I'm working seventeen hours.

"How we gonna be able to take care of a grandchild? And your son ain't even here to help. I'm sorry if this hurts. I'm sorry if I'm saying the tough stuff, but I'm being real. Jeff's gone and we need to move on. Jada has a future that includes finishing school. And having a baby just ain't a part of that future."

My brothers and I were standing behind our mom.

"You not gon' tell me that y'all gon' deal with this without me!" Mom said, fussing. "Are you tellin' me that she's not gonna have the baby?"

Finally, he said, "Y'all need to get your mom up on out of my

apartment. This is my daughter and we gon' deal with it how she needs to."

No one seemed to notice that Jada was in the corner crying. Our parents just kept going back and forth at it. They were getting so loud and crazy that obviously this girl could not take anymore of it. Suddenly, she ran outside and I followed her.

"Jeffery, why'd you have to leave me? I'm sorry I told you it was Bone's baby. I just thought it would be better. I didn't want to mess you up and keep you from going on to college. I didn't know you were gonna take it so hard. Please forgive me, God. Please forgive me!" Jada sobbed.

I was going out there to console Jada, but hearing what she said made me stop as if I'd come to a stop sign and a policeman was waiting to give me a ticket if I proceeded. And then when I was able to move, when I could go forward to comfort her, it was like my car broke down. How could I comfort a girl who basically was confessing to the fact that she was probably the reason why my brother took his own life?

Now granted, I found out that he owed Bone money for not throwing the high school state championship game. I'd also learned that his grades were horrible and he probably wasn't going to get a chance to go to college after all. But I still knew Jeff to be so strong. None of that made me think he'd be that down. But this? I believe that he loved Jada. If she told him that she was having someone else's baby, he would have been devastated. I screamed to release my pent-up frustration.

Jada turned around and said, "How long have you been standing there?"

“Long enough,” I said with one hand on my hip. “Why’d you lie to my brother?” I demanded.

“I don’t know. I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought I could pull this off. I didn’t think he would end everything. I was fooling myself that Jeff wouldn’t care. Please, please forg—”

Getting close to her face, I snarled and said, “Please what? My brother’s gone. We don’t have no real reasons or answers why he did what he did. If you told him this terrible lie, then of course he felt helpless and weak. How could you? And you don’t even know if you want the baby!”

Jada looked at me with tears streaming down her face and said, “Yasmin, you have no clue about what I’m going through!”

I was overcome with the sick feeling grief brings. At that point, I ran back to my own apartment. Sitting on the bed that I shared with my mom, all I could do was rock back and forth.

Lord, I thought I knew You were there. You’ve proven to me that You care about me, but why does each day seem to be harder? Why can’t I just feel good? Why can’t I just get good news? Why can’t I be a normal eighth-grade girl? Drama free?



“Wait a minute. I’m not taking no handouts from nobody. What’s all this food for?” I heard Mom say in an irate way.

I was surprised to see my counselor and pastor’s wife, Mrs. Newman, and my English teacher, Miss Bennett, at our apartment. They said they had come on behalf of the *Reach Out and Touch* ministry from our church. The baskets of food they brought sure smelled good. So good that my brothers had come out of their bedroom to find out what was happening.

“Mom, what you sayin’? We hungry,” York said to her as his eyes got really wide, staring at all of the food.

“Boy, I told you, you might be getting bigger but you are not grown up in here. I didn’t ask for no handouts. I don’t want no handouts. Thank y’all very much, but go to somebody else’s house. The lady next door on the left, Sandra, got two little kids. And believe it or not, she’s struggling worse than me. Take the food to her.”

“Mom!” I said, feeling really embarrassed that my mother had such pride. My grandma had fussed at her about being too prideful to accept help. She couldn’t even accept a blessing.

The first time that we visited the church, Pastor Newman’s message moved my whole family and we joined the church. Then the minister over the new members’ ministry explained to us the importance of not only being a member but of having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Mom even left the service saying that she was happier than she’d been in a long while.

“Mom, how come we can’t accept it?” I asked.

“Because—in case you forgot, Yasmin Peace, I’m the one who makes decisions up in here,” she said sharply.

They were being nice to us and bringing us a meal when, truth be told, earlier in the day Mom was trying to figure out what we were gonna eat. I could understand not wanting to take handouts if you didn’t need it, but she’d already said we were struggling. She had two jobs and was still behind on the rent and utilities. Coupled with the way my brothers ran through the food stamps, we needed help.

Mrs. Newman said, “You know, I’m sorry, Mrs. Peace. The church wasn’t trying to make you feel like you can’t do this. We know you didn’t ask for a handout. It’s just that this is the end of

the holiday season and we'd like to bless grieving families who have suffered a severe loss. This is just a little something to start the New Year off with a victory."

Miss Bennett stepped forward and said, "Yes, she's right. So many people get so much during the time when they actually lose a loved one, but after that, sometimes they still need folks to come by and show them some love. That's what we're all about."

Mrs. Newman chimed back in and said, "We can imagine the holidays had to be tough, but we were praying for you guys. If you need anything, the church is here to help. Please take this ham, fried chicken, green beans, rice, macaroni and cheese—"

"Aw, come on, Ma. You gotta let us get that," York said.

"Shut up, boy!" she said to him. "Go sit down."

"And we've got black-eyed peas," Mrs. Newman continued. "Can't start the New Year off without black-eyed peas. If you prefer us to take this food next door to your neighbor, we can do that. But we'd certainly love to give it to you all. Maybe you can invite your neighbors over here to share with you. There's plenty enough."

Mom looked at my brothers who were practically drooling like they couldn't wait to tear into the food. Then she looked over at me and saw that I was a little salty because she had sort of embarrassed me in front of our visitors.

Then she said calmly, "Just so you know, this isn't a handout. We appreciate it. Kids, let's put everything in the kitchen."

We laid the spread on the kitchen table. My brothers were smiling from our place in Jacksonville all the way to Miami.

Before Mrs. Newman and Miss Bennett left, they asked if we could circle up in prayer and thank God for His many blessings. My mom said that was a great idea; my brothers, who acted as if

they hadn't eaten in years, reluctantly grabbed hands.

We walked over to the table and Mom just hugged me. "Thank you, baby," she said as she gave me a kiss on my forehead.

"For what?" I said still having a slight attitude.

"Just because. Just because," was all that she said.

Maybe I did need to keep trusting God. Maybe He was working in my mom's heart after all. Though I was still so bummed out with her, I had to force a smile on my face because of her change of heart. It sure felt good having her arms around me. Something was definitely working.



"Ooh, this sure is a lot of food," Mom said after Mrs. Newman and Miss Bennett left. "Yas, why don't you go next door and see if Miss Sandra is at home."

"Yes, ma'am," I said and headed to her apartment. As I approached the door, I didn't even have to knock; I could tell there was no one home because it was so quiet. Usually, you could hear the kids playing and making noise inside their apartment. Besides, her car wasn't parked outside in its usual spot.

Miss Sandra was an interesting character. She had two young kids: a five-year-old daughter, Randi, and a son, Dante, who was almost two. She worked at the grocery store stocking items on the shelf, and she also worked nights at a second job.

Back last spring, I remember when she and my mom got into it. Mom had caught her leaving the kids at home alone while she was out trying to make ends meet. When Mom threatened to call the Department of Children and Family Services, also known as DCF, Miss Sandra just broke down. Ever since then, my mom was

trying to do all she could to help the lady. We watched the kids, and we shared our food with them.

But after Jeff died, Mom just shut out all that helping others. One day I heard her mumbling that she could barely help her own children. How was she going to help someone else raise theirs? After that, we didn't know who was taking care of her little babies, but I knew my mom still cared about them.

"They're not there, Ma," I said, coming back to our apartment.

Then she put on her shoes.

"Where you going?" York said to Mom. "We 'bout to eat. I know you gotta go to work, but can't you even eat with us?"

"Boy, calm down and mind your own business. Y'all set the table and warm up the food. I'm grown, don't ask me no questions," she said.

Yancy cracked open the door to find out where Mom was going; surprisingly, she went right over to Myrek's house.

My brothers and I stood in the doorway eavesdropping.

"I'm sorry things got a little out of control the other day, Mike," my mom said. "I have some food. It's New Year's Day and everybody deserves a good meal. Would you and the kids like to come over and eat with us?"

"Yvette, why would we want to do that? You're trying to tell my daughter what she's got to do with her baby."

"No, it's not gonna be none of that. I learned my lesson. Though I got strong views, I've just been praying about it. Some stuff I can't fix, like my ex-husband being in jail when I need him, you know? You just gotta learn how to roll with the punches and move on."

"See, why she gotta be talking about Dad to him?" York said as

the three of us listened. “I don’t want them coming over, eating our food. We got a refrigerator that’s empty. We can have leftovers and grub for days. I sure hope he says no.”

“Quit being selfish,” I said to York.

“Yas just wants Myrek to come over here, Yancy,” York said, getting under my skin like a bad rash.

“Yeah, she just wants Myrek to come over here,” Yancy teased as he messed with my hair.

I wasn’t even thinking like that. Myrek and I were cool with each other. We decided we had some feelings for each other, but we just want to be friends. We weren’t trying to have nothing serious going on.

My two brothers had their issues. I still couldn’t believe that Yancy hated being smart and detested being teased by his peers so much that he had started getting bad grades just so he wouldn’t have to take accelerated classes. And finally he gets a girlfriend, Veida Hatchett. She was supposed to be my friend but had dropped me the first time I didn’t like her being so fast with my brother.

And York wasn’t any better, wanting to act like we had more than we did. He felt the need to dress in the fliest clothes so bad that he was willing to steal for them. Then he was arrested and had to perform community service.

Both of those things were stressing my mom out so bad. And then for her to find out that there’s a chance that a part of my oldest brother could still be here on earth made her wrestle at night. I’m sure that’s why she was unable to sleep at night; she was carrying so much on her. Yet she treated me like I was a kid and wouldn’t talk to me like a friend who could take some of this stuff

off of her. But I do feel bad that even though I didn't want to show her any resistance, I still gave her lip—more than she deserved.

“Let's get ready for our guests, y'all. Mom asked us to get the food ready. Let's just do it, okay?” I told them, trying to be a good daughter.

“You act like they're comin',” York said.

“Mom's over there asking them,” Yancy said. “What else are they eating? They're just like us. Poor, trying to make it. They'll be over here for some food.”

Sure enough, ten minutes later my mom came through the door with Mr. Mike, Myrek, and Jada. Myrek and I looked at each other with such awkwardness. We had been best friends since forever. But why did it feel different now? Maybe it was just because we were growing up. I thought he looked quite handsome in his new sweater that he must've gotten for Christmas—but I wasn't going to tell him that.

Teasing him, I said, “Make sure you don't eat up all the chicken legs. You know that's my favorite part.”

Blushing and nodding, Myrek said, “For real, though, I'm glad your mom came over. My dad was fixing chicken noodle soup.”

Jada said, “Hey, Yasmin.”

I remembered the last time I had seen her, she was confessing that she had really hurt Jeff with some of the things she'd said to him. At that moment, I thought I could never forgive her. But then it was as if God pinched me. I had to move past this.

I said, “Can I talk to you for a second?”

“I'm really not up to it, Yasmin. I just can't deal with the stress. My dad and your mom have talked about this enough. I really want a good meal and then I'm going back to bed.”

“I’m not gonna stress you out, but I do want to talk to you. Mom, we’ll be right back,” I said, heading to my bedroom. I wasn’t taking *no* for an answer.

Sitting down on my bed, Jada said, “Okay. What? I was wrong and I’m sorry.”

“Well, I’m sorry too for acting all high and mighty like I was judging you. I know you didn’t mean for Jeff to go over the edge. He made that decision for himself. I guess I just wanted to let you know that I don’t hold you responsible. That’s all.”

Looking surprised, Jada said, “Thanks, Yasmin.” We hugged and then she and I headed to the kitchen.

Just then, I heard Mom and Myrek’s dad laughing. For two people who weren’t getting along a few days before, they were certainly acting chummy now.

“This ain’t even gonna happen and go down like that,” York said.

“What?” I asked.

“Myrek and Yancy are talking about getting the two of them together. That is not gonna happen as long as I’m here. No way.”

I didn’t know how I felt about that, even though my parents were divorced. With the divorce and my dad still being in jail, it didn’t mean that he and my mom couldn’t get back together when he got out. Mom had made a lot of sense when she said some stuff wasn’t for us kids to get into. But whatever Myrek’s dad was saying to her, it sure felt good to see her smile. The meal was a blessing to both of our families.



When I returned to school after the Christmas break, I thanked my English teacher, Miss Bennett, for coming by to help

my family. I also went to my counselor's office to thank Mrs. Newman and to just talk.

"Mrs. Newman, I'm sorry that my mom didn't want to accept the help at first." Needing to vent, I went on, "You just don't even know. She is so strong. She does it her way, but it's like I don't even have any say over anything. Like she doesn't care at all what I think. Sometimes I get so tired of her acting like that. I don't have any hope that she's ever going to change and see me as the young woman I'm trying to be. Lately, York and Yancy have made bad choices. Then with my brother Jeff taking his own life—it's been really hard on her."

She touched my shoulder and said, "Listen, Yasmin, you just told me she's going through a lot. Don't lose hope in her. I believe your relationship will get better. You and your whole family will bounce back stronger from all that you had to deal with last year.

"Most people we minister to act as if they think they deserve stuff just being given to them. Your mom's not like that. She has integrity. She wants to provide for and take care of her kids. She may seem overprotective, but she's just a mama bear who's had some cubs wander a little too far away. And because your mom knows that you haven't, she just wants to do everything in her power to make sure you don't stray. There's love, honor, and strength in her."

I told Mrs. Newman about the drama between Myrek's family and mine and how my mom went over there with her Bible and then ended up really getting into it with Mr. Mike. Then a couple of days later Mom invited the family over to share the dinner that the church had blessed us with.

"Well, Yasmin, as you can see, just because a person is a Christian doesn't mean that they don't get angry and maybe say or do

some things that they wish they hadn't. The important thing is that your mother extended herself to another family despite the conflict between you all. I'd say that your mom is really demonstrating the love of Christ—even in her own pain. And at the very least, thank God that she took the Bible with her!"

We had been through so much. And we weren't totally healed; the pain and the loss of Jeffery still hurt so badly. I had no idea what would happen with Jada, and I worried about York and Yancy going through their own tough times. I also had major concerns about my mom trying to keep our family on track. However, I knew I had to keep giving it all to Him.

Through it all, thankfully, God hadn't forgotten the Peace family. We were getting stronger each day.

Experiencing the Joy

Stephanie Perry Moore

Yasmin Peace Series Book 3

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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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 someday, 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.

Learning to Love

Stephanie Perry Moore

Yasmin Peace Series Book 4

MOODY PUBLISHERS
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Chapter 1

Protector from Harm

*A*t fourteen years old, I already knew about the stresses of life. However, I wasn't going to let the tough times beat me. I am a survivor; after all I'm from the hood. Someway, somehow I was going to find a way to love every part of my dysfunctional world. As I had learned from my middle school mentors, you have to look at life from a positive perspective.

Since it was Labor Day weekend, I was excited to be outside at the hopping neighborhood block party. So much had been happening in my crazy world. Yes, I had lost a brother to suicide over a year ago, and I miss him a lot. But things were finally looking up. Yeah! After six long years of being behind bars, my dad was out at last. Now he's a truck driver and lives near us in Jacksonville, Florida.

My brothers and I were glad to finally have Dad's strong presence in our lives. We would just have to learn how to love each other as a normal family again and find a way for our loss to make us stronger.

Also, my mom now has a steady job. She's not struggling and trying to make ends meet by working at dead-end jobs like she used to do. She still works hard, but having a career as a medical technician makes her feel worthy.

My two brothers, York and Yancy, and I are triplets. And they're still acting crazy. No one could tell stubborn York anything. And though Yancy is smart, he hasn't really been applying himself. He thinks he knows it all anyway. My folks were getting stressed with them acting out, so they decided they'd work together and stay on their sons.

My best friend, Myrek, and I are into each other. The guy who I now could admit had my heart was back in my life. He and I are about to meet up down the street.

"Hey, cutie pie," he said as he saw me approach the corner.

We used to live right next door to each other, but since our apartment caught on fire, we had to move to the other side of the complex. Jacksonville in September is still pretty hot, and to be outside at night on a long weekend—let's just say our projects were jammin'.

"Okay, so why you got that basketball?" I asked him, knowing that Myrek loved to play and hoping that he wasn't changing our plan to spend time together. I picked up on the clue that he wanted to go and play ball with the guys in our hood.

"Your brothers were just telling me about this little tournament going on against that wack team around the way," he explained. I knew that he was trying to justify why he was thinking about doing something different.

So I put my hands on my hips and said, "Come on now. We supposed to be doing our thing."

He came up to me and said playfully, "Tell me, how were we gonna kick it today?"

"I guess you'll never find out if you're gonna be playing basketball." Pouting, I turned around and started walking back toward my place.

"Oh, see now, why you gotta do me like that?" He jogged around to the front of me and tossed the ball at me. The hard ball just missed hitting me in my nose.

"Ow!" I screamed extra loud.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

I swatted at him. "See, you tryna play!"

"I'm trying to play with you," he smiled and said, realizing I was actually okay.

All of a sudden, York and Yancy came up full speed behind me. Yancy almost knocked me down and thought he was being funny. I rolled my eyes at them both. Couldn't they see that I wanted time with Myrek?

"Quit bothering the brother. Let him have a little fun with his boys. Man, y'all just got back together and you already smothering him," York scolded.

The three of them stood there waiting for a reaction out of me. My crazy brother York was really starting to get on my nerves. I wanted to take my foot and kick him in the knee so that he would fall down and run back home crying or something.

But, realistically, I couldn't believe he was gonna call me out like that. He knew how much I had been tussling, wrestling, and all upset that Myrek was dating some other new chick at our school. This girl, Raven, had given me much drama by rubbing it all in my face because she and Myrek were an item. I had tried to push it off

like he really didn't matter and act like he was just my friend. But the closer I saw them getting and the more I saw him with somebody else, it really touched my heart that—you know what?—that was my place in his life. I mean, at least we had to give us a try. Myrek had wanted that for so long, but I was the one running in a completely opposite direction.

It was probably because of all the problems we'd been having. And besides, our parents were dating, which could be another complication. Well, now that situation was on rocky ground. My brothers and I secretly hoped that our parents would get back together. But knowing how much distance there had been between the two of them—was that even possible?

"Earth to Yasmin." Myrek interrupted my thoughts. "Hello, hello?"

"What? You wanna go play with them?" I said as I saw him looking at me with puppy-dog eyes. "Then, go play!"

But Myrek turned to the boys and declared, "All right, she's got an attitude, y'all. I'ma stay with my girl."

"Man, you know we can't beat them without you," Yancy pleaded with Myrek and York stood silently backing him up.

It was so cool because my brothers hadn't been getting along. But then the whole fire incident happened and that brought them closer. It was a pretty rough experience. York had gone into our next door neighbor's apartment to help her get out of the flames. Yancy had felt bad and wanted to go in after him. I don't know, but when York came out alive, something changed for us. Maybe it was because we had already lost our oldest brother, Jeff; I guess we all just knew that, as hard as life was, it's a blessing to have each other. So we were learning how to get along and how to care about one

another. We were beginning to understand that other people's feelings mean something.

Giving up on convincing Myrek to go along, my brothers went on down the street. I could tell Myrek really wanted to play when he kept fumbling with that stupid ball.

There would be plenty of times for us to be together and have fun. And I did care about his thoughts. So I said, "You know what? I'm just gonna head home. You can play."

Immediately, he got overly excited. "For real? I can play?" Then, without further hesitation, he said, "Come on. I'ma walk you back home."

"What you mean, you gonna walk me back home? I want to watch," I said, frowning like he wanted to keep me away from the action. Actually, I had just decided to change my mind.

"It's not gonna be nobody but dudes out on the court. You and me can hang out tomorrow. I just don't want you hanging around like that. They talk about girls that just hang out and stuff. Mm-mm, not my girl."

"Your girl? Wow. That sounds pretty good," I said to him.

"You look pretty good."

We walked hand in hand back to my place and it just felt so special. We hadn't agreed much in the past but now we were together. When we stepped onto my porch, he pulled me closer to him. I knew that he was about to kiss me. Just then my dad pulled into the driveway and shined his lights on both of us. We jerked away from each other.

Dad got out of his car quicker than if the engine was on fire and rushed up to us. "Hey, what's going on here! What is this?"

"Dad, you know Myrek," I said.

“I don’t think I know this Myrek because the Myrek I knew was your buddy. Son, what’s going on? You all up close on my daughter. I ain’t having none of that, young man. Uh-uh. And you’d better know it!”

Myrek was shaking. “I-I was just telling her good night, sir.”

“Well, you don’t need to tell her good night . . . blowing your bad breath all on her and everything—”

“Dad!” I said, hot that my father was ruining our time.

“Seriously,” he scolded, “y’all need to step back and always have three to four feet between y’all. If you can’t do that, y’all don’t need to be in the same space. You got it? And another thing, y’all are still too young to be dating anyway.”

“Dad!” I shouted again.

“I got you, sir,” Myrek said, quickly giving my dad respect. “Yas, I’ll holla at you later.” And he jogged off.

“I know he just told me what I wanted to hear. I’m gonna talk to your mama about this.”

“Dad!” I said a little softer this time, “he’s my boyfriend.”

But he was truly mad and said, “So you say. But your dad, whose opinion counts, says no way!”



Other than my dad embarrassing me and the trouble I went through with Myrek’s ex-girlfriend, the school year had really gotten off to a pretty good start. I liked all my teachers, and the class work in high school wasn’t too hard so far. And in spite of Dad’s opposition to it, Myrek and I had our thing and, whatever that thing was, we were straight.

Besides all of that, my relationship with Veida, Asia, and Perlicia

was now very cool. In middle school Perlicia and Asia had always gotten up under my skin. And Veida had betrayed my family. But thankfully, at the very end of that year, we had worked through all those difficulties.

I realized that all three girls weren't much different from me. I mean, we all had some type of problems at home. At first, I thought Veida didn't know what hard times were because her father was a lawyer and she lived in a huge house with her entire family. Her older sister was a senior this year and she really had it going on. But even though all that seemed right, her parents had some issues. Veida's dad was so busy with his legal practice that he wasn't paying enough attention to his home life. So everything wasn't so happy after all.

I wasn't expecting it but Veida got into a relationship with one of my brothers. Then the next thing I knew she started liking the other one. She also still liked a boy named Maurice from her old middle school. He went to high school with us too. Through all of that Veida became troubled. Her feelings were confused, and that led her to cause a lot of drama in my family. But, at the end of the day, she felt really bad about it all and now she's my girl again. We just vowed to be friends for real. We were not only modeling buddies who wanted to look good on the outside, but also girls who had each other's backs and would help each other build up our self-esteem.

Perlicia, on the other hand, was really a loudmouth. She wasn't polished around the edges. Maybe I could help her with that. She and I are gonna have to talk more seriously and really get closer. Our friendship should mean more than just being around each other because we both were popular.

And then there's my girl, Asia. Her mom was in a relationship and the guy came on to Asia. For the longest time, her mom didn't believe her. Thankfully, that was all resolved and her mom kicked the guy to the curb. But that crazy situation took its toll on Asia and her mom's relationship. Then Asia was trying to date this guy who was also a senior. She got in a little over her head when the guy wanted her to go farther than she was ready to go. She told me that she was done with him, so hopefully she left all of that alone. But she and I need to talk about that too.

"Come on, come on! We gotta get in there and get a good seat!" Asia said as she pulled my arm to catch up with Perlicia and Veida. The four of us were going to the dance team tryouts meeting. Being a Trojanette dance girl made freshman stock go up dramatically. There were twenty slots on the team: five seniors, five juniors, five sophomores, and five freshmen. The first fifteen positions had been filled the year before. So there were only five spots open. There must have been at least sixty girls in the gym who were salivating at the mouth, wishing and wanting desperately to be on the team.

The Trojanettes performed three numbers for the rest of us. We were gonna have to learn the numbers in a week. Those girls were sassy, sharp, and all that; just seeing their routines made me very intimidated. I've always danced around the house, but I definitely haven't had any real training or anything like that. Veida had taken ballet and tap for years, and Perlicia and Asia had been in a hip-hop class at a recreation center for a long time.

"Hello, ladies. I'm Gloria Smith, the dance team sponsor. As you can see, the Trojanettes are awesome. We come with it. We perform with excellence. And we get respect. We're looking for five girls who possess the pizzazz, skill, wit, and charm to join us. We

want girls who can come right in and be an asset to our team. So, come on out here and try to learn this first number.”

I didn't want to get up out of my seat. I loved what I saw before me, but somewhere deep within I had no confidence to accomplish it. I couldn't dance like that.

“Come on,” Veida said as she yanked me up.

“Yeah, we need to get up front so we can see,” Asia added.

The front? I thought. *I need to be way in the back.*

I went and stood out there with Perlicia, Asia, and Veida. But when they got comfortable in the front, I eased my way to the back. I hadn't realized, though, that I didn't get on the very back row. And I was actually standing in front of Raven and her girl, Shay. Now I was even more intimidated.

“I can't believe he chose her over me,” Raven started telling her friend.

I just kept my cool and stayed focused on what I was trying to learn. According to Myrek, Raven was really bitter. But I couldn't help but wonder if she could dance.

When I started dancing, I heard Shay say, “I don't know, girl. She's basically got two left feet. She's tall and she's all right, but she ain't nowhere near as cute and tight as you and me. You can tell she doesn't have any kind of dance training like you and me. Don't worry; she won't be making this dance team.”

“Okay now, let me see you do it,” Ms. Smith said as she walked toward me. I really had no clue what to do. “Sweetheart, if you plan to make this team you are going to have to practice at home and really pay attention. I know we're moving fast; that's why we need girls who already have dance experience. You've just got to work hard if this is something that you want. If it doesn't work out, you

can always try out next year. A lot of girls who don't make it on the freshman team try out their sophomore year and bump some of the girls off the squad."

Then she patted me on the back condescendingly and walked away. What was I supposed to take from that? Was she trying to tell me that I was not gonna make the team? Did I just need to walk off and quit right on the spot? I was so frustrated, and it didn't help that I could hear the giggles behind me. I wanted to turn around and whack somebody. But instead I took three deep breaths and stayed in my element. I was trying to concentrate on the girls teaching the first number. The only thing I could do was give it my best to learn the part.



The practice was over about an hour later. Asia, Perlicia, and Veida came over to me as soon as we were dismissed. As we headed toward our lockers, they were chatting about how easy the moves were. I was so frustrated.

Veida said, "So, what's going on with you? Why weren't you right beside us? We got this down, girl. We're planning to practice a few more minutes before it's time to go home. Let's change real fast and meet right back out here."

Trying to be realistic, I said, "I don't think I want to do this, y'all."

"What do you mean, you don't wanna do this?" Asia said to me.

"I don't have it like you guys do."

"We can teach you," Veida chimed in.

"Yeah, girl. All you gotta do is work a little harder to the beat

and you'll make the squad. We checked it out and there wasn't a lot of competition. Most of those girls need to go home and try again—like never." Perlicia laughed, feeling really proud of herself.

The three of them slapped hands. They didn't understand that I was in that boat. I was nowhere near a dance expert. To make things worse, Raven and Shay walked up beside me and called themselves imitating me. I lost my balance and fell into my friends.

"Y'all really need to help your girl stay on her feet," Raven taunted.

"I know you ain't talkin', Raven. You were hiding in the back somewhere," Perlicia replied as she helped me to my feet.

Raven and Shay just laughed and walked away. I was very upset. I was a horrible dancer.

"I can't do this, y'all."

"Girl, don't even let her get to you," Asia said.

"She's just jealous about Myrek," Veida commented.

"I can go and take care of them chicks right now," Perlicia said as she took her fist, jammed it into her hand, and pushed it into me. "She don't know us."

I said, "Yeah, but they were back there with me and I wasn't that good. Okay?"

"We've got a week to practice," Veida encouraged.

All of a sudden, some girls came running out of the gym toward us yelling, "It's a fight! It's a fight!"

Seeing somebody go at it wasn't particularly where my mind was. I still needed to figure out if I should keep trying out for the dance team. Who would be crazy enough to be fighting after school anyway? Then it hit me; my brothers were trying out for basketball. Veida's ex-boyfriend, Maurice, was trying out too. That

sounded like a recipe for trouble. I just knew somebody from the Peace family had gotten into something. And they probably couldn't get themselves out of it without me there to intercede. So I took off running toward the boys' gym with my three girls right behind me.

When we got there, sure enough, I couldn't see exactly what was going on because a crowd of kids were gathered around. But I heard York's voice confronting somebody. "What's up, man? You gon' call my dad a jailbird and think I ain't gonna take care of that?"

"You gon' be joining him if you don't back off!" It was Maurice for sure.

York kept challenging. "All you doing is talkin', man. I punched you and you ain't done nothin'. Your little words can't hurt me, punk. Talkin' about my daddy. Wanna be a man? Talk about me. Do something to me. Hit me! I got this. I can take care of you right here, right now."

I could hear York clearly, but I didn't know where Myrek and Yancy were until a minute later when they showed up. As always, the word about a fight had traveled fast. "What's going on?" Yancy asked me.

"It's our brother. He's trying to defend Dad's honor."

As soon as she saw Yancy, Veida started melting. "Hey, how have you been?" she asked him.

"Ugh, we don't even have time for that," I said to her.

I pulled Myrek and Yancy over to the side. "Look, York is up there fighting."

"That ain't good because he's got a knife," Yancy reported.

"What?" I was shocked at that bit of news.

"Yeah. When we were dressing out, I saw it," Myrek added. "I tried to get him to leave it in the locker, but he put it in his sock."

What's all this about anyway? Why is he up there fighting? He had a good practice. The coach really likes him."

"Well, maybe you need to go and stall the coach so that he doesn't come in here and kick my brother off the team before he even gets on," I said to Myrek.

"Yeah, partner, that's a good idea. I got York," Yancy followed up.

York certainly was a hothead. He thought the only way to prove that he had it going on was to be violent with anyone who threatened him. And, honestly, he couldn't have learned that from my father because Dad never said that the only way to be a man is to knock somebody out. In fact, it was just the opposite. He taught us through his letters and the visits we had with him that the bigger person always bows out of a fight.

It was that crazy Bone. He's the one who had been putting weird ideas into York's head. To gain respect in our community, my brother thought the only thing that he could do was hang with the neighborhood thug. And that extreme thinking was about to get him locked up for sure.

When Myrek walked off, I turned to Veida and Perlicia, "We've got to figure out a way to get rid of these people and help break up this fight. I've got to get to my brother."

"I can handle it," Perlicia responded. Then all of a sudden she yelled, "The cops are coming!" Immediately everybody started scattering toward the nearest exits.

That gave Yancy and me free range to go up close to the action. Veida was right next to me. She quickly started talking to her ex-boyfriend to calm him down, and I went straight up to York.

"What is going on?" I started in on him.

“Look, York, man . . . so what he said something about our dad?” Yancy spoke up, trying to talk some sense into him.

“Just because you would let it go don’t mean I should. I ain’t as soft as you,” York shot back.

I could see Yancy getting ready to show our tougher brother that he wasn’t such a pushover. So I hurriedly got in between the two of them. “Okay, this is not the time or the place, guys. You two really need to get on the same page. York, come on. Let it go,” I pleaded.

I knew that he wouldn’t walk away so easily, but before York could say anything, I heard the other guy say, “Get out my way, Veida!” Maurice was shouting as he pushed her. He was getting louder and more determined to stay in York’s face.

“You need to back off,” Yancy said to the boy.

“Man, please. You can’t even keep your girl; I ain’t listening to you,” Maurice said as he moved in even closer to York.

Then York reached down and pulled the knife out of his sock. He pressed the button to let out the very sharp blade. The shiny object was sparkling, but the glowing sight definitely wasn’t pretty.

“Oh, what, I’m supposed to be scared now? Don’t play with me. I’m packing.”

“Oh, no! York, he’s got a gun!” I panicked and then I quickly sent up a prayer. *Lord, You see what is happening here. We need You to step in right now and help us get out of this situation before anyone gets hurt. Thank You for coming to York’s rescue before he gets into some real trouble. Amen.*

“Show it to me then, man,” York said, trying to keep me out of the way.

“I’ll show it to you if I have to,” Maurice said, stepping closer.

York moved the knife from behind him and was about to throw it, and I dived between the two of them. I couldn't let him hurt someone and get locked up for good. At that moment, I didn't care what happened to me physically. I had to save York from himself. It all happened so quickly. But suddenly, I became a protector from harm.

Enjoying True Peace

Stephanie Perry Moore

Yasmin Peace Series Book 5

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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?*