

DOES GOD LISTEN

TO

LITTLE BLACK GIRLS LIKE ME

By Katrina Valentine

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by

Katrina Valentine

Published 2017

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ISBN: 978-198145095

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this book to my Lord and Savior for keeping me. I know now that you never left my side.

Acknowledgments

I would like to first acknowledge my mom, Ivy Valentine who never gave up on me, my children Rashawn and Anycia and all my other children whom I didn't give birth to but through God helped strengthen me and to all who believed in me.

Special shout out to my cousin author Kawand S Crawford A.K.A. Don Kawand for assisting with the release of my debut novel. Shout out to Ashley Shepherd, author and graphic designer at Kreationk for the fire book cover!

Thank you for encouraging me to complete my dream!

Preface

I've often heard people say that children don't remember things that happened to them after a certain age but I believe this is false.

I know that the mind is a very wonderful and mysterious tool. People in general not only children remember a vast variety of events especially the traumatic ones.

I think that it's not a case of not remembering but of protection. In some cases, the mind can't handle some of the things that happen so as a protective measure it blocks off certain memories unless you have a reason to remember like for the protection of another child.

These are the things that make and shape a young mind as they develop into adulthood, these are also things that are seldom talked about because of fear or embarrassment.

Some events may cause you to question yourself, your faith and humanity but I'm here as proof that when you were wondering whether or not God was holding your hand he wasn't (He was carrying you).

I know this because he carried me and he kept my mind strong and safe so that I can be the voice for others.-Katrina Valentine

SYNOPSIS

Does God Listen to Little Black Girls like Me is a riveting heartfelt fictional story of true events. It's about an innocent young girl trapped in the horror of a blended family. Katrina, a six-year-old girl whose mother is involved with another woman that's trying to escape her abusive husband, finds herself at the mercy of her mother's lover, and male family members.

She prays every night that God will protect her innocence as she tries to protect little Alain, the youngest member of the blended family. It's not long before she began to experience an unimaginable amount of abuse that no young girl should have to live through. Katrina's mother is caught up in trying to help her partner and maintain their unconventional family that she is clueless to the pain and suffering that her only daughter is subjected to on a daily basis underneath her nose!

Chapter 1

(the Chase)

It was the day after the Fourth of July and I remember running as fast as my little feet would move me. This is actually how my memories start off, me and mom running through the streets of Brooklyn. My mom had dressed me in a cute red dress with a white collar and had me looking really cute with my favorite bow sitting directly in front of my growing baby hair.

People were still shooting fireworks in the air and the weather was hot as the devil in NYC that Saturday afternoon. At first, I couldn't understand why or what we were running from because I was only six years old. I remember wondering, *is this a game? And if so why was mom crying?*

"What's wrong mommy?" I wanted to ask but we were running so fast it was hard for my six-year-old feet to keep up.

My heart was racing so fast that I didn't know what was moving faster, my feet or the air rushing through my lungs which made my heart skip a beat.

Then the yelling came. It seemed to be coming from the direction that we were running from.

The sound is very faint at first but then the voice I began to recognize started getting closer, louder and more coherent. I could hear it clearly! That's when I knew what or should I say who we were running from. It was Tina, my mom's on-again-off-again partner and she was pissed off.

Tina and my mother met and started dating when I was around two. Tina is also a woman in an abusive marriage with three young boys. Oliver, the oldest is twelve years old. Oliver is a tall, broadly built, light caramel complexioned boy with a nonchalant attitude, Anthony Jr. a ten-year-old brown-skinned boy with the smooth brown skin like his mother but the stern look of his father and the attitude to match and then there is the baby boy, Alain who is six years old just like me.

Alain and I became best friends. He is like a little brother, my baby and any other endearing name that one could think of. We are together most of the time and do almost everything together. Alain is much smaller than I am so most days when I saw him I carried him on my hip like he's my baby and the fact that I am big for a six-year-old didn't help either. I don't know if he minded or not but he let me do it.

Tina's husband is an Army Sergeant and is currently stationed overseas. Sergeant Anthony Towns always sounded like a strong and stern name, meant for a strong stern man. He is strict and believed in ruling with an iron fist and not just with his children but with Tina as well.

"Sergeant" is what everyone including his wife and kids called him at his request. It's only one of his many rules. If you didn't obey there would be hell to pay and he meant it Literally! All who knew the Sergeant knew this. Stay clear or suffer the consequences except for Tina's mother, Mrs. Brenda.

Now, Mrs. Brenda is a force to be reckoned with. She is a female version of the Sergeant only she is even crueller with her methods of control. The Sergeant and his mother-in-law kept a firm hand on Tina and her children. Whenever he is stationed somewhere he would turn over control to his mother-in-law and she controlled all aspects of Tina's life.

She manages all the money, the kids and Tina's comings and goings. If things were not right Tina would have to endure severe punishment even though she is a grown lady. I never understood it but that's just how it was.

I was almost out of breath, but I could hear Tina yelling at the top of her lungs, “LINNNDAAA! LINDA PLEASE DON’T LEAVE ME!”

We kept running as Tina continued to yell, “LINDA, WHY YOU RUNNIN’ BABY? I LOVE YOUUU! PLEASE WAIT! LINDA BABY, I LOVE YOU!”

I heard Tina and when I glanced at my mother, noticed a frantic look on her face and it frightened me. I’d never seen her cry until this day and that made it even scarier.

“RUN KATRINA! HURRY!” Mom yelled at me and I knew even at such a young age it was something serious.

Something told me that we were in trouble, but I didn’t understand why? My mind raced with a multitude of questions, “*What is happening? Why is Tina chasing us? Why are we running? Why can’t we go home?*”

I was growing fatigued as all those questions floated through my head. I was ready to stop running when Tina’s voice broke my mental thoughts but this time her voice was different. The pitch in her voice escalated as she appeared to be yelling at someone else and the loud sounds of car horns honking made me glance over my shoulder. It was a quick look but what I saw made me pull from my

mother's sweaty hand and completely stop in my tracks.

Tina was laying sprawled out in the middle of Fulton Street, a busy two-way street in Brooklyn. She was in front of a B 25 bus that is sitting still at the intersection of Fulton and Ralph Avenue. The bus driver was honking his horn continuously, while Tina yelled at the top of her lungs for the bus driver to hit her.

“LINDA DOESN'T LOVE ME ANYMORE!” Tina yelled repeatedly.

Seeing Tina laying in the middle of the street like that and the bus so close to her body made me scream, “NOOOO!”

She must've heard me because Tina jumped up, “LINDAAAA! I love you, baby! Come back...” And the chase was on again.

I could feel sweat on my mother's hand when she grabbed mine and we started running again. We quickly turned the corner and ran up another block with Tina only several yards behind us. Mom spotted an open doorway to an abandoned building and quickly snatched me inside and into a dark corner out of eyesight of Tina. She then looked down at me and using her index finger motioned for me to be quiet as I watched her chest expand in and out from the heavy breathing.

I stood as quietly as possible until something scurried across my little feet and it startled me. I looked down, then in the direction that whatever it was running in and spotted two of the biggest and nastiest looking cat size rats that I've ever seen in my life.

My mother must've seen it too because as I got ready to scream she grabbed me up in her arm with one hand and placed the other hand over my mouth while whispering into my ear, "Shhhh!"

I didn't know what the look on her face meant back then but now I can recognize that all too well. It was fear! I could see the horror and sadness in her eyes as tears flowed rapidly down her face.

The sound of footsteps passing by the open doorway to the abandoned building is getting closer and I was more terrified than before. I looked back down towards the ground and the light from the shadows made it easy to see what seemed like 1 million mice and rats. I wanted to scream so bad and I did only no one could hear my scream with my mother's hand placed firmly across my mouth.

When Tina passed by the open doorway of the abandoned building her shadow temporarily blocked out the light and for a moment I prayed that all the rats would run away but when the light shined back through that open doorway the rats

were still there and maybe even more! I felt like they were going to eat us.

I could feel my mother's body trembling and I knew she was still crying even though I could no longer see her face. Tina finally made it far enough past the abandoned building that we could no longer hear her footsteps. The movement outside accompanied by the movement on the inside of the abandoned building steered up the ugly rodents even more.

My mother turned me around in her arms putting her finger to my lips again shushing me. She held me closely pressing my cheek up to hers and I could feel the tears transfer from her face to mine. I don't think my mother knew how hard she was squeezing me, but I could feel my teeth pressing into my lips. I was afraid to say anything and could still see the rats, so I just shut my eyes and prayed.

"Dear God, if you help us I will be a good girl forever and ever, Amen!"

We stood there for what felt like forever until my mother, while still holding me started towards the entrance of the building. She slowly began poking her head out the vacant doorway looking in both directions.

I guess Tina wasn't in sight because after a few seconds my mother put me down just out of the

way of the rats. She then grabbed my hand and we started running towards Atlantic Ave. in the opposite direction from Tina. Once we made it to Atlantic Ave, my mother spotted a cab sitting as if it was waiting for someone, so we ran towards the waiting cab even though he had no idea he was waiting for us.

We jumped in and the cab driver was startled by the sudden intrusiveness in the backseat of his cab. He jumped clean out of his skin. The driver jerked his head around to find out who had just interrupted his solitude.

With the look of fear on his face, resembling my mom's and anger he began yelling at us, "WHAT THE HELL LADY, are you serious?"

The cab driver looked down at me and he calmed down just a little. He looked at my mother again and this time he saw the state that she was in and he calmed all the way down.

"Okay ladies where do you wanna go?" He asked.

My mother just crumbled in the backseat and began crying uncontrollably. The only thing that she was able to say that either one of us could understand is to lock the doors.

The light began to turn green but before the driver could proceed someone banged on the

window. All three of us jumped at the loud sound of banging on the window of the back-right passenger side. The cab driver turned around to look at this short slim dark-skinned woman who was no bigger than a minute, yelling and banging on the passenger window while trying to open the door at the same time.

I began screaming as Tina pounded on the window and began begging my mother to open the door, “Linda baby, please! Don’t do this! I love you!”

Tina was so close now that I could hear the slurring of her words, and see the messy way her clothes hung off her petite frame and obviously on backward.

The cab driver, shocked first from the intrusion by us and now this banging on his cab window by this woman, looked away from the passenger window long enough to ask my mother one simple question.

“Ma’am, do you know this woman?”

“Please just drive,” was all that my mother could manage to say.

The light turned green and Tina realizing that my mother wasn't getting out of the cab thought that she could stop the car from moving before the light turned red. She then ran to the front of the cab

while yelling at the driver, “YOU’LL HAVE TO KILL ME BEFORE I LET YOU TAKE MY LINDA AWAY!”

The cab driver turned back around, watching Tina and stunned for a second at what was happening right before his eyes.

He sat in his driver’s seat with his mouth wide open just looking at her and then I remember him mumbling something along the line of, “What is wrong with this crazy bitch!” As he waited for the cars in the next lane to pass.

Just before the light turned red and the last car passed, he floored it, swerving around Tina and leaving her standing in the middle of Atlantic Ave screaming at the top of her lungs while other drivers went around her honking their horns and yelling obscenities.

I watched through the backseat window as Tina quickly disappeared out of my view. I turned back around in my seat when I could no longer see Tina through the back window of the car. I felt my mother’s body tremble and looked up at her. That’s when I noticed that she’s now crying uncontrollably into her hands and all I could do was watch. We pulled up to the light at Bedford and Atlantic Ave when the cab driver finally looked in his rearview mirror and quietly asked, “Where to miss?”

I guess that was all he could manage to say while he watched this lady with this little girl have a meltdown in the backseat of his car.

As the light turned green the cab driver crossed the intersection to the other side of Atlantic and Bedford Ave, pulled over and put his car in park. He then turned all the way around, opened the plexiglass partition that separated the driver from passenger and produces some tissue for my mother.

He waved the tissue at my mother and with the most understanding tone that I think a stranger could manage at the moment whispered, “Miss, I really do understand what you’re going through, but we can’t drive around the city all night.”

He then flashed a soothingly disarming smile. My mother looked up at this man who was giving her a warm smile and some tissue to wipe her face, finally started to regain her composure. She straightened herself up as she thanked this stranger for his kindness while reaching for the badly needed tissues.

After wiping her face, she finally gave the cab driver a weak smile, apologized again and said, “Can you take me to E. 109th St. and Lexington Ave please?”

The cab driver’s facial expression never changed. Instead, he looked at me and with a wink

he turned, started the engine and confidently said, “Manhattan it is for the two lovely ladies!”

The ride started out frightening with all the commotion going on with Tina but then it quickly went from scary to boring. My mother sat there not saying anything. Occasionally I would look up and see tears running down her face. Every now and then I would catch her wiping them away, but she didn’t say a word. The cab driver didn’t say a word either. He drove in silence until we got to the Manhattan Bridge and then he decided to put on the radio. And it was soothing for all.

I know it was soothing for me and I noticed that by the time we reached the end of the bridge my mother wasn’t crying anymore. She was nodding her head and singing along with the songs coming through the speakers.

I was able to lean back now and think to myself.

“I think my mother is going to be okay. But what about Tina? Is she going to be okay? Did anything happen to her? Did she get hit by a car while she was in the streets? Are we going to see her again?”

That’s the last thing I can remember thinking when I snuggled up against my mother, listening to her singing along with the radio. I closed my eyes

and let the night's air along with the tiredness of the whole day wash over me. I was so tired I forgot to say my prayers as I wondered if God would protect me from whatever adventure was coming next.

Chapter 2

(Bad News)

I had fallen asleep with my head on my mother's lap during our long ride to Manhattan. My mother woke me up as she paid the cab driver, thanked him and then apologized again.

He smiled and told her it was okay. His kindness eased my mind for the moment as he wished that we have a blessed day and be safe. My mother put on a small smirk as we got out in front of these huge buildings that I would later come to know as the projects.

I looked up at the massive buildings and immediately started asking questions.

"Who lives here mommy?"

"A friend of mommy's," is all she said while grabbing my hand and leading me towards the building.

I could tell that my mother was still in no mood for much of anything, so I just kept all my thoughts and questions to myself. As we made it up the stairs to the front of the huge building we could

see that the door was slightly opened. My mother grabbed and pulled on the door handle and we entered the lobby of the building.

We headed towards the two elevators and one opened as sort of a welcoming, so we entered. My mother pressed the button for the 17. floor and the door closed behind us. As the elevator went up I looked up at my mother and could see the stress on her face and grabbed her hand in hopes of comforting her.

When the elevator door opened on the 17. floor we exited the elevator, turned the corner and walked down a long well-lit hallway to apartment 17 F. We stopped at the dirty brown apartment door with a gold square metal door knocker and again I wanted to ask who lives here but instead I stood there, waiting.

After a brief and awkward moment, my mother finally knocked on the door. There was nothing but silence and after a few more seconds of time ticking by no one had still come to answer the door. My mother knocked again but this time a little louder. We waited a little longer for what felt like forever to me and soon we could hear the shuffling of slippers dragging across the bare floor.

I remember feeling butterflies in my stomach at the thought of who or what was going to be on

the other side of this door. I think I held my breath until I heard a woman's voice ask, "Who is it?"

"It's Linda!"

The person on the other side looked through the peephole and began to unlock her door. I tightly gripped my mother's hand and took a little step back, so I was slightly hiding behind her.

The door opened and behind it was a short, heavysset, brown-skinned woman with long light brown hair. She had a very pretty, kind face and the largest breast that I'd ever seen in my life.

She looked up at my mother and asked in the sweetest voice, "Linda... what's wrong?"

My mother didn't answer, instead, she just started crying. The pretty lady said nothing. Instead, she gently grabbed my mother's hand and began to usher her inside. As my mother started to enter the apartment I guess the pretty lady noticed me because she looked down with wide eyes and said, "Oh My God! Who is this pretty little thing?"

She then smiled a smile that reassured me that everything was going to be okay. For some reason, this lady looked like an angel to me. Maybe even my fairy godmother. I don't know what it was, but I instantly knew that I liked her and wanted to be with her. She would keep me safe was how I felt.

“Hi pretty! Grrrrlll what’s your name?” She asked me, and with a timid voice I responded, “Katrina.”

She smiled even harder and said, “Well my name is Mary but you pretty little thing can call me Miss Mary, Auntie Mary, Mama Mary or whatever makes you happy baby, okay?”

I looked at this lady with the pretty face and warm smile and knew that she was gonna be my new mommy. The pretty lady turned around and reached out her other hand for me to take. I clutched her hand and she led both me and my mother into her home.

Miss Mary walked us down this long hallway and then into a large kitchen. Her home was very bare but clean. In the kitchen was a table covered with a white tablecloth with four chairs that didn’t match and nothing else. She led us to the table pulling out my chair and helping me into it.

After getting me situated she said, “I know you two must be hungry?”

I immediately said yes but my mother quickly jumped in, “Mary I am so sorry for coming to your house so late. I don’t need anything but a glass of water please.”

I looked up at my mother and said, “Mommy I’m hungry.

Miss Mary smiled at me and asked, “Do you like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches sweetie?”

I smiled at her and said in a very happy voice, “Yes I do.”

Miss Mary walked over to her fridge and pulled out a jar of grape jelly and a loaf of Wonder bread. She then went to the cabinet retrieving the peanut butter and she began making my peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Miss Mary set a small plate in front of me with my peanut butter and jelly sandwich on it next to a tall glass of milk then kindly said, “Eat your sandwich and drink your milk baby. Your mommy and I are going to the living room to talk okay?”

I nodded my head yes and sat there eating as they walked into the next room.

While sitting in the kitchen enjoying my food my mother began crying again. The sound demanded my attention as I wondered what was happening with her.

It made me stop halfway through eating and climb down from the chair with a mouthful of my sandwich. Within seconds I was in the hallway that

led to the living room. I stopped in the doorway just as the last bite of my sandwich went down my throat and peeked in on them.

I needed to know that my mother was okay but didn't want to get into any trouble for not listening, so I did my best to make sure no one saw me. As I peeked into the living room I could see my mother sitting on a couch while Miss Mary sat in a metal folding chair in front of her. She was holding both of my mother's hands in hers while my mother tried her hardest to compose herself.

"Linda, everything is going to be okay. I got somewhere safe for you and your daughter. Don't worry," Miss Mary whispered to my mother and for some reason it made me smile.

It was all my ears needed to hear so I went back to the kitchen to finish the other half of my peanut butter and jelly sandwich and milk.

After eating the last piece of the sandwich, I grabbed the glass of milk with two hands and drank it straight down.

"Mommy, mommy, I'm finished," I yelled out to let her know that I was done while wiping milk from my mouth with the back of my hand. But instead of her coming to check on me, it was Miss Mary that entered the kitchen to see what I needed.

“Are you done, baby? Do you want some more?” She offered to me with a smile.

I shook my head no and started getting down from the chair as she removed the dishes and placed them in the sink.

Miss Mary walked back over to me and took my hand and whispered, “Come with me, baby.” And I happily followed.

She led me into the living room where my mother was, and she immediately asked if I was tired. It didn’t hit me until she asked the question and although I was sleepy I still shook my head no.

While standing there, it gave me a chance to get a good look at the room which was slightly furnished. There was the brown suede couch that my mother occupied and a small end table that doubled as a stand for the 19-inch television on top of it. There were also two standing lamps, a few folding chairs and some pretty cream and brown drapes hanging across the double windows that complemented the couch. There wasn’t much furniture, but it was clean.

Miss Mary led me over to the couch and I sat next to my mother. I looked around the room, examining my surroundings and started to yawn.

“Lay down baby it’s okay. I’ll be here when you get up.” My mother said after noticing me yawning and my head immediately fell into her lap and I eventually dozed off.

It had to be between eight and nine in the morning when the sound of the Transformers cartoon on TV had woken me. I slowly opened my eyes but quickly sat up after being startled at what I was seeing. Sitting on the floor in front of the TV watching the Transformers cartoon was three young boys. Two of them appeared to be around my age but the dark-skinned, skinny boy looked a lot older, like maybe ten.

As I sat up they turned around and for a second we all just gawked at each other until the oldest boy spoke.

“Hi, I’m Terrence,” the slim dark-skinned boy with glasses started off. “Did we wake you?” he asked.

“No.” I responded, and before I could say anything else the little light skinned chubby boy asked, “What’s your name?”

“Yeah what’s your name?” The third boy who is of medium build and who’s skin complexion is between his two brothers.

I just looked back and forth between the three boys and then down to my feet.

“Katrina.” I bashfully mumbled out while noticing that my shoes were missing and so was my mother.

The oldest boy must have read my facial expression because he blurted out of nowhere, “I think that’s your mom in the room with my mom.”

The chubby light-skinned boy chimed in by saying, “Our mom’s gonna get up in a few minutes. I just went into the room and woke her up. She said she’s gonna cook us breakfast. That’s why we’re waiting.”

I didn’t say anything. I just sat there looking back and forth between the two boys.

“That’s my little brother Kevin with the big mouth over there.” the chubby boy announced.

“I don’t have a big mouth. You do stupid,” the youngest boy Kevin snapped back.

“And over there sucking on his thumb is our other brother Devon,” Terrence confidently spoke.

Devon just looked at me and waved so I waved back as the shuffling sound of slippers coming down the hallway demanded my attention. I turned to look and Miss Mary wearing a nightgown and a

scarf on her head entered the living room on her way to the kitchen. She looked over at me and smiled.

“Your mommy is sleeping sweetie so we’re gonna cook breakfast and let her sleep okay?”

I looked up at this pretty short lady and smiled back.

“I see you met my boys,” she said as she held out her hand for me to follow her into the kitchen.

Her words made me jump down off the couch, grab her hand and let her lead me into the kitchen. The boys just turned back around to their cartoons after saying good morning to their mother and receiving their good morning replies from her.

We went into the kitchen and Miss Mary gestured for me to sit at the table. She then looked at me and said, “I know a big girl like you know how to cook already. So how about you cook breakfast and I’ll help?”

Her kindness forced a big Kool-Aid smile out of me and I jumped down from the table.

“Okay, I know how to cook.” I thought to myself. *“I cook all the time on my Easy Bake Oven, because of this, I know I can cook.”*

I stayed in the kitchen with Miss Mary until breakfast was ready and you couldn't tell me that I didn't do my thing in that kitchen.

Miss Mary did most of the work, but she let me help every step of the way and I loved it! We made a big pot of cheese grits that I put the cheese in, sausages and scrambled eggs with cheese which I also put the cheese in and mixed for her. The biscuits were all me from start to finish and I couldn't have been prouder when they came out of the oven.

Miss Mary handed me a plate of biscuits and said, "Baby girl put these on the table and go tell the boys to come eat breakfast while I get the plates."

I ran out of the kitchen and into the living room yelling, "BREAKFAST IS READY!"

All three boys jumped up running towards the kitchen, play fighting along the way and yelling about who's gonna get to the table first and I just moved out of the way while laughing at them. I didn't want to get knocked over.

After they were in the kitchen and it was safe to go in without sustaining bodily harm I turned and went in the kitchen as well.

Miss Mary was passing out the plates and pouring orange juice into four glasses for us to drink while I sat in the only available seat at the table. My

plate was already there waiting to be devoured and I was more than welcome to oblige.

I only turned away from my food once and that was when I saw Miss Mary leaving the kitchen with a tray that held two plates of food in two glasses of juice. That's when I felt a pang of guilt. How could I forget about my mother? But something in me felt safe and for some reason, I knew that she was okay. I smiled at Miss Mary and turned back to my waiting plate.

The boys and I finished our breakfast, put our plates in the sink and went back to the living room to finish watching Sunday morning cartoons.

A little while later I heard laughter coming from the back room and recognized my mother's voice and it was a happy sound.

My head shot up in the air and I got that pang of guilt again, being lost in my own happiness at the time I'd once again forgotten about my mother. I jumped up and ran in the direction that her voice was coming from. When I got to the bedroom door she was sitting on one end of the bed and Miss Mary was sitting on the other with the tray that held the plates that once had food on them.

They were talking and laughing and for some reason, I wanted to be a part of it. I ran into the

room and jumped onto the king-size bed crashing into the tray and knocking over the glasses.

My mother jumped back and got ready to scold me when Miss Mary reached over and pulled me into her warm arms and started tickling me.

“You wanna play,” she said while tickling me.

I just laughed and looked over at my mother thankful for this woman who had just saved me from a possible whooping.

After our little tickle fest, Miss Mary held me tightly and said, “You’re gonna be the little girl I never had. Would you like that?”

I snuck a side glance at my mother and quickly said, “Yep.”

My mother reached over to snatch me out of Miss Mary’s arm laughing. Miss Mary slapped her hand out of the way and quickly threw me behind her into some fluffy pillows on the bed so that she couldn’t get me. I was laughing and scrambling to the head of the bed out of my mother’s reach and for the first time we were having fun. My mother and I were actually happy, and I didn’t want it to end.

Miss Mary spoiled me. She became my mommy for the next few days. My mother and I

were the happiest that I'd ever remembered being. The boys and I got along well. I played outside with the two youngest boys and whenever Terrence, the oldest went to the Big Apple Supermarket to pack bags he took me so that I could make some ice cream and candy money. I secretly never wanted to leave and don't think that we would've until that phone call to my grandmother.

Miss Mary didn't have a phone. My mother decided to go downstairs to a pay phone on the corner, in order to check in with my grandmother. When she returned upstairs after the phone call to my grandmother she said absolutely nothing. She just walked straight into the back room with Miss Mary and slammed the door shut.

I could hear my mother crying again and instantly knew that it was bad news. I was finally happy and didn't want to go back. My mom couldn't do anything to me because I am Miss Mary's baby. She allowed me to get away with murder and I loved it!

"Katrina... Katrina, come here girl!" My mother called me and with a heavy heart, I slowly walked to the back room. I just knew what my mother was going to say and wasn't ready to hear those cruel words.

I walked into Miss Mary's bedroom and plopped down on the end of her bed next to my mother. Never looking at her but keeping my focus on my hands that were on my lap while silently praying to God to not let my mother say that we had to go.

"Baby," she started, and a lump grew in my throat, "I spoke to grandma and she said that we need to come home."

When the words rolled off her lips, I looked up and with tears in my eyes, softly asked, "Why mommy? I don't want to go back to that house!" I whined in protest as a sharp pain traveled swiftly through my heart.

"Okay Katrina," my mother said with a stern voice, "Now I don't know what's going on because your grandmother didn't tell me everything but I think it's bad. We need to go home but I promise you we'll come back."

I looked over at Miss Mary with pleading tearful eyes and she extended her arms out to me. I got up off the bed and ran over to Miss Mary. She wrapped her arms around my body and it made me feel safe.

I whispered into Miss Mary's ear, "Don't let me go. Why can't I stay with you?"

She pulled me away from her and with a big smile said, “I wish you could stay because you are the little girl I never had. Listen, I’ll tell you a secret though.” She then pulled me back into her arms and whispered into my ear. “I’m working on it so maybe you will be here for good real soon. I’m definitely gonna keep you but don’t tell your mother.”

The soft and kind words she whispered made me smile and although I still didn’t want to go somehow, knew everything was going to be okay.

I looked up and gave my mother a sly look and whispered back to Miss Mary, “Okay, I think I’ll like that.”

We stayed at Miss Mary’s house for the rest of the day with it being evident that neither one of us wanted to leave.

At around six that evening we were on the A train and headed back to Brooklyn. I tried not to think about anything especially that house and those people, but it wasn’t working. My mind kept going to that horrible day that Tina chased us into an abandoned building filled with rats.

While the train roared through the dark tunnel, I closed my eyes and began to pray,

“Dear God, if you help us to go back to Miss Mary’s house I promise I’ll be a good girl forever and ever. Amen!”

Chapter 3

(Trouble at Home)

I remember getting off the A train at Ralph Ave and walking up the stairs. I started getting this deep feeling of depression way down in the pit of my stomach as we reached that last step.

I stopped at the top step and took a deep breath as my mother, tightly grasp my hand and dragged me towards my grandmother's house.

As we reached my grandmother's house my mother looked at me and said, "Baby I want you to go play while I find out what's going on."

I gladly listened to her order with absolutely no debating because I didn't want to be there any way.

We lived on the next block over. I could see my stoop from in front of my grandmother's house and all my friends were playing outside so up the block I went.

At about 8 o'clock my mother came searching for me and found me around the corner on Lewis

Ave between Atlantic and Herkimer Street in my friend Tanika's yard playing with her dolls.

As soon as I saw my mother turning the corner onto Lewis, I began to have a little something called wishful thinking.

I ran over to my mother yelling, "MOMMY, MOMMY are we going back now?"

The disappointed look on her face spoke volumes without her saying a word. I guess my disappointment mirrored her feelings because with one look at my face she said, "No baby, not today but soon okay?"

Not giving me a chance to answer or even protest she went on to say, "Baby I promise but for right now we have to go home. Your grandmother told me that Tina had a problem while we were away and now she wants us to help Tina out. Can you understand and be patient with me for a little while?"

I looked up at her and knowing that it was a lie I still said, "Yes."

My mother took me by the hand and together we walked the half a block to our house.

We lived in a two-family house three houses down from the corner of Herkimer and Howard Ave

on the top floor. When we reached our apartment door we could hear music and a very loud commotion going on behind our door.

My mother stuck her key in the lock and realized that the door was already unlocked so she gave it a little push and the door swung open. The apartment was in shambles at first sight. We walked further into the apartment and could see dishes in the sink piled up to the counter, garbage all over the floor and a drunk Tina coming out of the bathroom.

She had nothing but her undergarments, wig on backward and a clear plastic cup in her hand yelling at her boys, “GET Y’ALL STINKING ASSES IN THE BATHROOM AND TAKE A SHOWER, YOU KNOW GOOD MOTHER FUCKERS! Y’ALL GET ON MY DAMN NERVES, I CAN’T STAND YOU LITTLE BASTARDS!”

She was stumbling as she came out of the bathroom and bumped into the wall coming around the corner. Tina bumped into me and my mother spilling half of her drink onto my mother’s shirt. A little got in my hair and you could smell the stench of liquor in the air.

“Linda baby you came home, you came back to me,” Tina says slurring her words.

“Yeah, Tina I’m home.” My mother reluctantly responded. “Who were you talking to

when we came in and what happened to the house?”

“Oh, that no good ex-husband of mines came over here and dropped these little nasty bastards over here talking about I need to keep them sometimes.”

My mother and I just looked at Tina as she continued, “I don’t want these little bastards. He needs to come back and get them before I kill the little shits!”

“Tina!” my mother spoke firmly, “All that isn’t necessary, so please stop it!”

She looked up at my mother and that’s when we both noticed Tina’s face.

“Oh My God, Tina! “What happened to your eye?” My mother asked after the shock of the swollen, black and blue eye Tina was wearing wore off.

“That no good mother fucker got mad because I wouldn’t fuck him when he brought the boys over. He beat me up but that’s okay. I’m going to get that no good mother huncher!” She slurred as I hid behind my mother feeling afraid.

“Where were the boys when this happened Tina?”

“They were in the next room,” Tina replied leaning on the wall to keep from falling. “They heard me yelling but these mother fuckers didn’t even bother to help, little bastards! Oliver, Anthony, Alain get your asses in here and say hi to Linda and Katrina! NOW!” Tina yelled. “I can’t stand these little mother fuckas, I wish I’d never had them.” she began saying a little lower but still loud enough for them to hear.

At this point, my mother couldn’t take anymore and started yelling at Tina.

“WHAT IN THE HELL DID I TELL YOU BEFORE TINA? STOP CALLING THEM KIDS OUT THEIR NAMES. WHAT THE FUCK IS WRONG WITH YOU!?! They’re kids, you don’t do that to them. You know that’s not the way I was raised, and I’ve told you not to do that shit around me. Damn Tina that shit doesn’t make no sense!”

Oliver, Anthony Jr., and Alain came walking into the living room.

“Hi, Auntie Linda. I missed you,” Alain said while running into my mother’s arms for a hug.

Although Alain and I are the same age, and although he was just four months younger he was very small. He is about the same size as a 4-year-old and since I am the size of a 10-year-old, would carry him around propped up on my hip like he’s my baby

and that's how I saw him. He is my little baby! I always loved it when Alain came over because that's when I got to play house with a real baby even though he isn't a baby at all.

Alain secretly liked it too because I am the one that babied him not his mom, not my mom, but me. For some reason, I felt like I had to protect him no matter what! Kind of like what a mother would do if she was a good one that is.

Anthony Jr. was the middle boy whom I tried my hardest to stay away from. It was something about him that I didn't like. Anthony Jr. stayed so angry all the time almost a mirror image of his father. It was like he was angry at the world. He hated everything and everyone but especially me.

Oliver the oldest boy was the quiet one. You never knew when he was around unless you saw him first or called his name and he answered. Oliver gave off the attitude of a person who just didn't care one way or the other. He just went with the flow of things.

Oliver and Anthony Jr. both walked over to my mother who was still holding Alain and gave her a half-hearted hug and a very dry, "Hiii Linda."

"Hey, boys, how you guys been?" My mother asked with a smile looking at the three boys. "I asked

your mother about you boys last week, so what's been going on?"

While Oliver and Anthony Jr. talked with my mom Alain and I decided to go in the room and play. Like always he was the baby and I was the mommy. After some play-time me and Alain left the room in search of some snacks. Oliver and Anthony Jr. was sitting in the living room watching television so Alain and I headed to the kitchen.

After searching the refrigerator and not coming up with much we went in search of our mothers.

"Mommy, mommy!" I yelled while Alain and I raced each other down the hall to our mother's room. Laughing the whole way because we kept bumping each other into the wall which made the task or racing down the short hall take a little longer than needed.

By the time we reached the bedroom door I could see Tina sprawled out across the foot of their bed and my mother was walking towards the door to greet us.

"Yes babies?" she asked watching the state we were in and laughing right along with us.

"We're hungry mommy," I said and Alain chimed in along with me by singing, "Hungry,

hungry, hungry..." My mother and I both looked at Alain and we all bust out laughing.

"You two are so silly," my mother joked as she closed the room door behind her. The three of us headed to the kitchen to make something to eat.

"You two sit at the table," my mother instructed and walked into the living room to ask the other boys what they felt like eating.

Because the kitchen was right next to the living room we could see and hear everything going on in the next room.

"Hey, guys. What would you like to eat?"

"Pizza!" Anthony spoke out loud and my mother turned around and came back to the kitchen and asked, "Guys do you want pizza?"

"YEAH!" we both yelled a little too loud and we started laughing again.

My mother made a phone call and 15 minutes later we were on our way to the pizzeria on Fulton Street to pick up our pizza pie with extra cheese and pepperoni.

On the way back, we stopped by my grandparents stoop so that my mother could talk to her mother and father who was sitting outside enjoying the cool summer's night breeze.

I heard my grandmother ask my mother, "How is Tina?"

"She's okay mom. A little drunk but she's fine. Her husband assaulted her earlier. She said she doesn't want to press charges. I tried to tell her to at least get an order of protection against the guy, but she refused. I was still trying to talk to her when the kids came in and told me that they were hungry. So here we are."

"Listen, baby," my grandmother said, "I know what you're going through and I know you don't want to stay but Tina has a problem and she needs you. I don't want you to turn your back on her because you know that child doesn't have anybody but you right now. That's why she's doing the things she's doing baby. It's not good but you gotta help her."

Even though I was only six I knew what that meant. I stood there just waiting and feeling my little heart sink with every word that my grandmother spoke. We were never going back to Miss Mary's house and that was like speaking death to my little ears. I wanted so much to go back there where I was the baby, treated like a princess and most of all I felt safe. That night I prayed like I've never prayed before.

“Dear God, please, please, please keep me, my mommy and Alain, safe and Tina too. Can you please let us go to Miss Mary’s house again soon? If you do God I promise to never do anything wrong. I’ll be good for the rest of my life.

I promise I won’t talk back and I won’t act up in the church. I promise to eat all my food and I won’t put the vegetables in the garbage. I’ll make my bed every morning. I’ll do all my chores and I promise to do all my homework and be good in school. Please, please, please, Amen!”

It didn’t take me long to fall asleep as I wondered if God listened to little black girls like me.

Available on Amazon!!

