

CHAPTER 4

It was the rain. Cold, miserable. Cindy watched it pound the side of the bus and was reminded of her father and his reaction. Just as cold, dark, and unyielding as the metal on this modern beast of burden in this dark and gloomy night.

What had happened? Pregnant. That's all she knew. Instead of acceptance, she was rejected as another worthless "nigger" child with a bastard baby. Her father, the one who had counseled countless girls bearing fatherless babies, threw her out of the house, enraged with the shame she had brought upon her church and family. Her own mother turned her back as if she had never borne her.

Thomas had found her and took her in. Not once did he ask who or why, though it must have killed him to keep still. She could see it in his eyes, the hurt the anger, but, she couldn't tell him; she wasn't so sure herself.

He only knew she was hurt and needed help. Who would have thought that this cocky young man would be the one to come through when he was needed most? Of all the things she thought of him she never believed the depth of his caring and love for her.

Thomas slipped his arm around her. She felt warm and secure in his strong embrace. "What you thinkin' girl?" he asked softly. " 'Fraid of whats ahead? Don't you worry none. I explained all that was happenin' to my aunt an she said 'Come on'. I know its a long bus ride to Atlanta, but the beds are warm and the love is theah. 'Sides, I'll be beside you all the way. You get to feelin' poorly, let me know an we'll get the driver to stop awhile to let you rest."

"Yes, Tom, I'll let you know." Cindy looked up into his eyes. "I'm not 'fraid long's you're with me." Cindy hesitated then whispered "Thank you." Tom just squeezed a little tighter as they boarded the bus.

The trip was long and uncomfortable. Cindy had worried the whole trip down, alternately crying and sleeping, enjoying neither the scenery nor the company. However, they did arrive and were met by a middle aged woman, worn, dressed in rags, but radiating with such love that Cindy almost didn't see the teenage boy standing next to her. The woman moved quickly toward them and began speaking before she even arrived. She was a whirlwind of motion.

"Jeremiah, get them bags. Thomas, you gonna drag that chile all over Atlanta? Set her down right here and let her catch her breath. Go help Jeremiah get the bags and hold the cab until we get there."

"Hello to you to Aunt Jenny." said Thomas, smiling.

"Hello to you, too, Thomas," said Jenny. "Now get on with what I tole ya and Let me take care of this little lady."

Aunt Jenny turned to Cindy. "I'm Jenny White. Call me Jenny or Aunt Jenny. Most

everyone else does. I figure you must be Cindy the way Thomas holds onto you."

"Yes, ma'am, I am" Cindy said.

"I tole you, my names Jenny an I won't have any of that ma'am stuff around me if we gonna get along. Makes me feel old. Now, what can we get for you? Bein' you first chile, I suppose you need sumpin'_, food? Cool drink? Or just plain rest?"

Cindy looked lovingly into those wide anxious eyes and felt the warmth that she had missed for the past five months. She took hold of the woman's sleeve and fell into her arms. Crying gently, holding tight, she released all the pressure that she had held in, in one long quiet embrace.

All that could be heard was Jenny's repeated "poor, poor chile."

Quite unexpectedly, Aunt Jenny's eyes began to widen and her voice grew quite still. Cindy, realizing the change, pulled slowly back. No one in the half-empty depot noticed, but to Jenny it was as if the whole world had just changed. She looked directly into Cindy's eyes and whispered, "It's His child, isn't it?"

"Thomas had nuthin' to do with it. I swear," Cindy pleaded. "I'm not talkin bout Thomas and you know it," Jenny replied. "How do you know?" Cindy was wide-eyed with wonder.

"Listen, chile, I never believe any wild tale on faith. I've always insisted on discovering the truth. I look for facts. But somehow, I just know, feel, or believe that this is His chile. While I held you, I received a warm feeling, calm, peaceful, so overwhelming that it seemed to explain everything, even questions I never asked. Now tell me, before Jesus himself and all that's holy. Tell me to ease my mind. This is His chile, isn't it?"

"I don't know." Cindy said hesitantly. "With all my heart I wish to believe it's that simple. But how can I, a black child in the middle of this vast world, believe that I have been chosen to be the mother of Jesus' chile?" Then with anger, fear, and helplessness all welling up inside her, Cindy looked darkly at Aunt Jenny, pulled away and said, "Do you know what you are saying? What you ask me to believe and admit? How could I know? Who am I to debate the reality of God? For all I know this chile could just be the wicked games of the Devil hisself. What do you want of me? To admit that I alone am the chosen one and leave me and my child up to the ridicule and shame? Especially for some nigger woman in Atlanta?" With that outburst, Cindy fell, heaving great sobs upon the floor of that cold, impersonal building while Aunt Jenny, overwhelmed at the cold feelings Cindy felt, slowly regained her composure, gently wrapped her arms around Cindy, and led her to the waiting taxi.

They fell into the back seat of the cab with Thomas looking on, wondering but not daring to ask what had happened. By the look in Aunt Jenny's eyes, he felt immense sorrow and did not wish to interfere in its healing. Jeremiah gave the driver the address and they took off for home.

Forcefully but quietly, Jenny told the driver to pull over. The break in the silence jarred Thomas and disoriented him for the moment. When he looked out the window they were at the entrance to a large Church. Jenny was stepping out, gently encouraging Cindy, who had yet to let go

of Aunt Jenny, to follow her up the steps.

"Come on, Cindy. We need to talk," said Aunt Jenny. "Cain't it wait? I'm so tired," said Cindy.

"No, chile, this is too important to leave till we both feel better." With that she and Cindy approached the front doors, when Cindy froze at the top steps and refused to go any further.

"What's the matter, Cindy?" asked Jenny.

"I don't wanna go into a church." Cindy said with a cold expression on her face. "Why not, chile?"

"I fear It." said Jenny. "I fear the answers to all those questions. I fear God."

"Shall you forever live in fear. You have to face it. Just entering may answer the question of whether or not its Satan's chile. Do you think Satan could come into such a Holy place? Do you think God would want you to live in such fear? Come, Cindy. Come on in. It's warm and soft, quiet and peaceful. We can talk and we can pray if need be. We have to understand this. You need the answers; no woman can go to have a chile with such fear in her heart. Come, be at peace, come on in God's house."

Cindy slowly walked in. Like a small child, wide eyed with fear and wonder, she stepped closer, then rushed through the doors as if she was jumping into a cold pool on a hot summer's day. Cindy closed her eyes immediately inside the doors, held tight to Jenny and realized she was holding her breath. She waited to see if any cataclysm might befall her, then slowly released her breath and opened her eyes. Aunt Jenny was smiling the smile of triumph and laughter. She placed her arm around Cindy's waist and led her towards the altar.

"How long you been away from church, Cindy?" Jenny asked. " 'Bout four months," Cindy said.

"All that time. All alone and no answers. Feel better?" Jenny asked as they set down in the first pew.

Cindy did. She felt as she did whenever she entered her father's church, warm and comforted. At rest with the world.

"Now how did this happen?" asked Jenny.

Cindy began to speak, and as she retold the story of the odd man and the bright light, the following months, and trouble with her family, She became quite peaceful.

"Well," said Aunt Jenny, "from what you tole me, it most definitely is Jesus' baby and you should be quite proud."

"How can you be so sure?" said Cindy quietly. "How can you know what I do not? Do you realize what you're saying? I know I am not a woman of the world, but I do believe in God and the Bible and nowhere is there any word that Jesus will return to earth and have a son. And why do you believe a little speck of a person such as me could be the mother of such a baby? These are things for good men and women, strong men and women, not such as I."

"Oh, chile. Why is it that people can always believe the worst in themselves and not the best? Why do we always doubt ourselves so?" asked Jenny. "If you cain't believe in yourself or your God, believe in the baby. You love the child, don't you?"

Cindy looked up. "Why, no one's ever asked me. All they ask is where it came from. No ones ever asked me if I loved the child or loved being a mama."

"Well, do you love the chile?" Jenny asked again. "Yes," said Cindy brightly and securely.

"Then," said Jenny, "it don't matter whose child it is or where it come from. These things God will take care of in his own time. It's good enough that you love him, want to take care of him, and want him to grow to be your son. All else don't really matter. You do the lovin', and if there's any believin' to do, I'll do it for you. Together we'll work it out."

"Thanks, Aunt Jenny. Thank you for carin'"

"That's all right," said Jenny. "We better get home now. Thomas'll think we run off an left him. Besides, I'm gettin a bit hungry."

Slowly they walked out of the church, got in the taxi and headed to Aunt Jenny's home.