

CHAPTER 6

It was cold in Atlanta. Fortunately, Dex had found a warm hospital bed near the center of the city. Lori didn't quite know why she was here. The baby had progressed nicely and the doctor didn't see any reason to hurry the delivery. He felt it would come soon any way. In God's own time, he had said. She had told Dex she wanted it to come naturally and she wasn't even having cramps yet. But here she was in the hospital; Dex insisting that she have another checkup before the baby came. He had been so good to her the past few months. He never asked her about inducing labor again, took her to the doctor's office himself when she needed it, and sat there with all those women until she got ready to go home. It really hadn't been quite so bad. Well, Christmas would be over tomorrow, and she wouldn't have to worry about his scheme anymore. Boy, my back is beginning to hurt! She thought.

Aunt Jenny put Cindy in the back bedroom that lay close to the house next door. This cut down on the wind and with the space heaters and blankets on the windows and bed, it had a warm, almost surrealistic atmosphere. Cindy was sweating and beginning to know the pain of childbirth. She knew months ago this child would be born on Christmas. It seemed fitting, and she had tried to prepare herself for it. Aunt Jenny had sent for the doctor, but having delivered plenty of children herself in the neighborhood, only wanted him for "consultin' purposes.

"You'd have thought this child was gonna be hers, the way she was carrying on," thought Cindy. "Well, I guess in a way, it will be."

Thomas was fit to be tied, as proud a future poppa as a man could be. He paced, he sweated, and got in Aunt Jenny's way one too many times. She sent him to the store for groceries that could only be gotten on the other side of the town.

A soothing chorus of some songs seemed to constantly fill her ears, although Jenny swore no records or radios were on. She had told Jesus she was gonna be Thomas' wife when she was done having Jesus' child. This seemed to give her greater comfort, and she was sure Jesus was pleased with her decision. She hoped if she and Thomas had any children it would feel as wonderful as bearing this child had. She had never really talked to Jesus in one on one conversation, but she had always felt they had talked for hours the last few months and she knew well what He wanted and that He knew well what she needed. No words seemed to ever pass her lips, but the feelings were always there. She..... Oh, goodness, what is this? She thought in panic.

Cindy screamed. "THAT HURT!" Jenny just smiled and put another cold washcloth on Cindy's head.

Lori screamed in pain. "WHAT WAS THAT!?" she cried. Dex, who had been arguing with her doctor in the hall, came running to Lori's side. "What's up? What's wrong? Is the baby all right?"

Are you all right?" Dex asked anxiously. A worried look furrowed his eyebrows.

"THAT IS SO PAINFUL!" Cried Lori again as another spasm hit.

The doctor was there as quickly as Dex and checked her vital signs. Looking hard at Dex, he said, "Looks like you may get your wish after all, needing no help from me. Apparently God has decided Lori is going into labor." With that, he left the room and proceeded to the nurse's station.

Dex was bewildered, then ecstatic, then smiling just a big a smile as the Cheshire Cat.

"Hear that, baby? You gonna have a honey! No, that ain't right. Honey, you're going to have a baby!"

Dex looked down at Lori and seemed surprised at the look in her eyes. It seemed they had a lot of terror, anger, and a little bit of happiness. But his concentration on her looks ended quickly when the next spasm hit. Dex had remained too close and Lori was able to get a firm grip on the root of her problem, expressing in a physical way her entire feelings at that moment.

"Man!" Cindy didn't think she could take another one of those pains. Jenny called them "normal" contractions and did her best to make her feel comfortable. She had been layin' there for two hours now and the pains kept coming faster and faster and hurt more and more. She was beginning to wonder, since this was Jesus' child, why He couldn't stop the pain and just let the child pop out. And where is He anyhow? She thought, gasping. This is the son of Jesus. His daddy should be here. If doesn't show up soon, I'm gonna give Him a piece of my mind. Talk to His daddy. I'm sure Grandpa isn't going to take to kindly to Him not being present. Boy, is it warm in here. Think a lot of different things when you havin' a baby.

Honey, now you got to try to pace yourself. You got a long way to go yet," Jenny said. "Just cause he's Jesus' child don't make this birth any easier. You gotta remember, baby, this child's gonna live in the world of man and has to come into this world like any other child if he's gonna understand what it means to be a man." After Jenny spoke another stronger and more soothing song seemed to fill Cindy's ears.

"A few more hours! You've got to be kidding," Lori panted at the doctor. These pains seemed unbearable and the doctor wasn't ready to give her any drugs until the birth. Dex had since left the room. The doctor had sent him to the waiting room to nurse his injuries.

"You must remember," the doctor said, "birth takes time. It's not infrequent for labor to last days."

"You mean I'm going through this hell for days?" Lori said through clenched teeth.

"No, not you," the doctor said, quickly avoiding Lori's outstretched hand, remembering Dex's recent injury. "You're just about ready. Give it a few more hours and everything will be over."

Lori looked around. Those lights are sure bright, she thought. I must be sweatin' like a pig. Bet that 'glow' everybody talks about ain't so bright now. Damn this hurts. These bed sheets are

warm. Why do hospitals always use white? Why is it so damn sterile in here? God, here comes another one of those pains. Wish I could reach the doctor like I reached Dex, make them understand what real pain is. Hee hee. The contraction hit.

The doctor hadn't arrived yet, and this made Jenny angry. Never did see her get mad, thought Cindy. This is the most irritated I've ever seen her. Cindy was breathing very heavily now and Jenny was trying to get her into some sort of rhythm. Thomas had come back and Jenny had him boiling water on the wood stove. Choppin' wood and boilin' water. That boy had never worked so hard. Wonder what he'd say if he knew Aunt Jenny was just tossing the water out back.

The smell in the room was gettin' powerful, Cindy sweating, Aunt Jenny sweating, Thomas sweating and keeping the stove hot. It smelled of old blankets, moldy wood, humid afternoons, and burning logs. Cindy felt like throwing up. She was keenly aware of all her senses the feel of the wet sheets on her back, the look of panic in Thomas' eyes, the taste of cool well water on her lips, the sound of the wind outside the house, and most particularly the smells. That and this pain.

It was almost time. Cindy hadn't seen or heard from Jesus since the start of labor, some 10 hours ago. She was beginning to feel quite alone. The music still in her head was pleasing, but she wanted the Father.

Then, through an old door, past the blanket draped across the entrance, He strode quietly in. Cindy knew Him and smiled with as great a joy as she had ever known. Aunt Jenny, in her hurry, didn't look up from her chores, but felt a feeling of calm and joy, and love, and security, as she had never known in her life. Jenny turned toward the feeling.

"Sir?" she said.

The doctor just smiled and, placing a bag next to Cindy's bed, sat beside her on the worn old blankets. Placing a hand upon her forehead and then moving it gently down to her stomach, Cindy felt the release of all pain and the serenity of complete love. The music filled the air and the smell became that of the most beautiful perfume. It seemed as if room was bathed in the most perfect light and nothing could ever penetrate the complete comfort Cindy felt in His embrace. Cindy was only slightly aware that Aunt Jenny was in the corner, on her knees her face gazing softly at Him. Thomas was beside Jenny, transfixed by the miracle happening before him. And then there was the baby.

She was totally unaware she had even delivered this child, but yet knew it was hers and the pain of childbirth was over. She accepted her child from Him and then He held her in His arms as she held the baby. Looking first into her eyes and then the child's. She knew what he said even though he had not spoken. She nodded assent as if she were having a normal conversation. Then He rose and walked over to Aunt Jenny. Placing His hand upon her face and raising her look to His, He thanked her for all of her help in the same way in which He spoke to Cindy, through a look that said all and expressed more than could be spoken.

Finally, He embraced Thomas. The look of wonderment on Thomas' face probably brought more to the smile on His face than anything He had said to Him. Jesus then took Thomas by the arm to Cindy and the new child. He placed His child in Thomas' arms and placed Thomas next to Cindy. A finer, more perfect marriage could not have been had.

With a last look at all, the doctor then left, leaving behind the light, the chorus, and the glow of His presence.

Dex was beginning to worry. If Lori's labor lasted too much longer, they would miss the all-important deadline of midnight and their child would be born on December 26th instead of Christmas. Dex had tried to get the doctor to speed things along, but he had refused time and again. Only fate had begun Lori's delivery this morning. Dex had brought her in one more time, hoping to get someone to induce labor. He hadn't told Lori. Instead, he had been acting like a concerned father-to-be and she had gone along with everything. Now I really look good in her eyes since she went into labor, while she was in the hospital being checked up, thought Dex. He smiled as he thought about his good fortune. Boy, what that baby will bring in in donations if it is born on Christmas. What is taking so long? And what is that light?"

Dex had begun to notice a bright, almost too-perfect light shining through the hospital windows. As he started to get a better look, a nurse entered.

"Mr. Love? Your wife is being wheeled into the delivery room. It shouldn't be too long now. Do you want to wait next to delivery so that we can find you and tell you whether it's a boy or girl?"

Boy or girl? Geez, Dex thought. I've worried so much about getting this child delivered on time, I've forgotten that it could be a girl. Well, it seems that God is still with us tonight. Hopefully it will be a boy and we can finish what we started.

"Mr. Love? You coming?" the nurse said as she headed for the door.

"Yeah, yes I'm coming," Dex said as he followed her down the hall.

The shot was wonderful, Lori thought. Let them do anything they want now. I'm beginning to feel no pain. You know, I bet I do look ridiculous on this bed, in stirrups tied down like this. Oh God, her comes another one! That bastard doctor. Let him try to push, push, tied down here like this.

"DAMN," Lori screamed. "JESUS, this is HARD!"

And with those sentiments on her lips, Lori's baby was born. All wrinkled, all pink and red, with all fingers and toes, and screaming like a banshee.

"A boy?" Dex asked.

"A boy," said the nurse.

Dex leaped as high as he could, shot a fist in the air, and let out a whoop that startled even the nurse.

"Do you want to see your son?" the nurse asked. "What is his name, anyhow?"

"John," Dex said, "In honor of John the Baptist."

Dex knew, after all this, that he could get Lori to agree to the name. Hell, hadn't he got a boy child born on Christmas Day? Man, he could do anything.

Dex was looking in on John when he noticed the slight disturbance all around him. The few attendants in the nursery were looking out the window and looking in on Dex's child. Funny, Dex thought, I do seem to have the only child born in this hospital today. That does seem odd for a city of this size.

Then Dex saw it. It was close to midnight, yet the sky outside was as bright as day. That perfect light again, Dex thought. He walked down the hall to a window where he could get a better look.

It was coming from the sky, bathing an area around the hospital. He could see where the light ended just, about a mile from where he was standing, but the whole hospital itself was bathed in its light. Dex rushed downstairs and outside to get a better look. People were milling about him, trying for themselves to understand this phenomenon. Dex realized that the hospital stood just inside a perfect circle of this perfect light and the light seemed to be emanating from a far off star.

Dex thought, "Now this will definitely be a benefit that I can use for my plans for my child. What a great day."

He went in to see his wife, his child, and plan their future.