

The Book of James

by
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CHAPTER 1 (GENESIS)

She was black. Not in dress or mood, but in skin color. Not completely black, but rather that skin color uniquely suited to her race that gave them the right to claim the color as their own. Sixteen, black, and a woman in the biggest ghetto in New York City, these were the attributes first noticed when one met her. However, she had an aura, an attitude about her that made one feel her presence.

If you looked closer, you would see that behind the tank top and jeans skirt, she was attractive, a little more than average, but with a beauty born in youth. Conversations with the neighbors would assure you of some of her finer qualities. Her virginity still intact, her avoidance of drugs, and her devotion to her church gave her a rare status, particularly in her neighborhood.

Cindy was her name. Cindy Franklin. Some other day might find her reading or watching the soaps on TV, but today she sat on the front porch stoop of her apartment building. It was hot, humid and there was no air conditioning to cool her down. Their only fan had long since given up the task of cooling the apartment shared with her father and mother.

She reflected on her dad and wondered where he may have gone. Being a self-proclaimed man of God, founder and preacher of the New Faith Freedom Church, he often left for hours during the day with no word of where he could be reached. He never came home drunk, but when asked about his day he would reply, "I been ministerin' to them in need." Mama never asked much about it because he was a good provider. Besides, she was too busy with the church women and church functions to be concerned.

"Cindy!, Cindy Franklin, what you doin', girl?" The sudden yell and calling of her name brought her out of her reflections and drew her attention to a tall, swaggering boy coming down the street. A smile quickly crossed her lips as Thomas, her somewhat steady boyfriend, came to greet her. She giggled softly as she reminded herself that his name was Thomas, not Tom, a sore point that she used whenever she was want to tease.

"Nuthin much, cept swelterin' in the heat" she replied. What you doin? "

"I come to ask you for that time together you been hintin' bout. You gonna be able to squeeze me in tonight? "

"Not less you go with me to the church tonight. Papa wants me to play for the choir practice."

"Aw Cindy, you know I don't want to. Cain't you tell your Father you got plans?"

"You know I can't. `Sides, there's gonna be some cold drinks and the air-conditionin's working. Sounds a lot better than hangin' round some corner with a flat broke would-be Romeo."

"How you know I ain't got no money? Could be I had a movie in mind with some burgers

later."

"Well, if you had, it'd be the first time, you ain't known for bein' Mr. Ritz. Look, if you serious bout seein' me, come on down to the church about ten and walk me home. It could be a long walk if you on time."

"I'll be there, if that's the best I can get. Wanna walk with me for a coke?"

"No, Thomas, I got some things to do before tonight. Besides, it's too hot to walk. " " Then I see you later. Gotta meet Smitty `bout some bizness."

"Don't you get talkin' an forget `bout me."

"No way, Sugar, no way."

The "church" was really an old storefront in one block of many undistinguished blocks. The front was old clapboard that held little memory of the white paint that once covered its facade. Above the gray, peeling door was a hand-painted sign proclaiming in large blue letters, " New Life Freedom Church. " The large windows that once held merchandise for sale was now covered by self-sticking multi-colored plastic to produce a stained glass look. Inside, the combination of the plastic covered windows and light green walls seemed to create an atmosphere of cold green mist. This settled lightly on the thirty tattered kitchen chairs and bare floor that made up the sanctuary.

The smell creeped inside you as you entered, the stale smell one frequently finds in old abandoned buildings or the homes of your elderly aunts and uncles. The back of the building housed the altar, a mere pedestal taken from some long-forgotten hotel. Flanking it on the right was a sturdy wooden chair, distinguished only by the addition of armrests and its command of the room.

Behind the altar, directly against the back wall, were two rows of six chairs each. There sat the choir. Directly to the left of the altar was the old upright piano, its tunes reminiscent of the honky-tonk bar it came from, but entirely serviceable in giving thanks to the Lord. Beside the piano, between it and the back wall, stood a wooden door that opened upon a threadbare office that held a desk and two more chairs. On the far wall, a similar door led into the alley.

Cindy had been coming here for six years to hear her daddy preach, and she assured herself that her father was one of the best preachersmen, if not the best, to ever give praise to the Lord. He had a congregation of over fifty members and it was said if any sinner came within a block of his voice when he was fixin to save, they would immediately stop what they were doing and get down on their knees and pray. She knew she was impressed, and her own virtues were a direct result of this reinforcement.

She loved to hear her daddy preach. It filled her with joy and made her feel a true part of all that was good in the world. She would dance and sing, throw in a few "amens," and begin to get such an emotional high that she thought she may never come back down to the squalor that surrounded her. But tonight was choir practice, and the air conditioner stuck in the wall was going to add a new voice to the already off-key melodies that filled the hall.

Cindy had been first to come tonight. The sun was still up even though it was late evening, and she wished for a few cooling minutes of solitude. Her thoughts were mostly on Thomas. He was quite brash when in front of the others, but she had seen him alone and knew him differently. He was kind, gentle, and never condemning. They talked a lot and he never pressured or ridiculed her even when she disclosed her deep passion for her religion. He accepted her for what she was and she felt at ease with him.

The jar at the door grabbed her attention and in walked an elderly gentleman. He wasn't of her congregation or this neighborhood, but her startled expression was immediately replaced with a gentle calmness that radiated from within the man standing there. He was of a lighter skin color than hers, not brown like a few of her friends, but a lighter shade of black. He wore a sedate three-piece suit and carried a glove and cane. Despite the heat, he was not sweating. As he stood in the doorway, it seemed as though a glow surrounded him.

"Cindy..., Cindy Franklin?" He called and no other sound could be heard, not the air conditioners, the street noises, or even the scuff of her chair as she rose to meet him. His voice was not only crystal clear, but had the deep rich timber of a large old bell.

"How do you know my name?" Cindy asked.

"If you're Cindy Franklin, then I have some glorious news. You have been chosen. Of all to be brought before Him, you have been chosen to carry the new Son."

As he moved closer, Cindy grabbed the first chair she could and held it high above her head.

"I dare ya. You come one step closer and this chair will become a permanent part of your body. Who do you think I am that you could come up with some harebrained story and make me just lay down and give my body to you? And to blaspheme in a church of God. If Jesus wanted my body to deliver his Son then willing I would give it, but not to some slicked-up fool walking through the door. Now get out!"

But Miss Franklin, you misunderstand. It is not I"

She threw and missed and immediately picked up another chair. "If I'm gonna be raped. I'm going down fightin'," she thought.

"I only wish to prepare you. You will carry His Son and He will visit you tonight to plant his seed. I wish you the best and pray for your future." With that, he dodged another chair and left.

"I don't care who your pimping for and I'll give them the same I'm giving you," she shouted as she followed him out the door. She ran smack dab into Mrs. Jamison.

"What's wrong, chile? "

"Where did he go? " " Who, dear? "

"That man, the one who tried to attack me! "

"No one came out before you. Are you sure you're all right? Want some water or a cool drink? "

Cindy looked around and wherever he came from he was gone. Cindy let Mrs. Jamison take

her inside and give her a cool drink.

It almost felt like it didn't happen, and for some reason unknown even to her, Cindy felt compelled not to speak of it with Mrs. Jamison. She accepted the offer of a cool drink and tried to settle the gut wrenching feeling inside. When questioned, she mumbled a response and slipped over to the piano and began to play.

It was a quiet song, a love song, and the melody stilled the air and quieted the anger that had left a hollow feeling inside her. Mrs. Jamison busied herself with humming along and greeting the rest of the choir as they entered.

It could have been the beat, or the tune, but somehow the song started to overcome every unseen objection, every slight conversation, and every barrier to its music. All crowded close and quietly listened. Once again the room seemed to shut out all sound but the piano and its beautiful tune. Cindy started to sing, and her crisp clear voice filled the hall with the true passionate unqualified love that only youth, not hardened by years of heartache, could feel. As the final chords melted into the evening, her father lightly touched her arm.

"Who you singing for, darlin'?" he whispered.

"Jesus." she answered softly, and tears welled up in her eyes.

Someone else slid next to her on the bench and held her close. She cried softly, but the tears were not those of sorrow, but rather of love true love. The quiet inner knowledge you feel when someone you know loves you for who and what you are. And when you realize this it is sometimes too much to bear, and the tears begin.

The choir made their way to their positions at the chairs and her father asked her if she wanted to continue playing. With a joy she didn't even know she could possess, she said yes and lifted her head and began to play the favorite gospel tunes with which she had grown up. The choir quickly joined in and soon a full time, earthshakin', righteous-making, God-fearing melody pounded the air. They were swaying and singing and the sweat was pouring off the brothers and sisters as they shouted their praise to the Lord. Cindy didn't let up and carried them to new highs as she led them from one song to the next. One sister collapsed from the emotion and another fell to her knees, asking forgiveness.

One of the brothers begged her father to save him and her father, in a fit of divine inspiration began one of his Bible banging, Hell damning, fire and brimstone sermons that had built his reputation. All singing and playing stopped as they listened to what surely must be the Lords true words. Amen's and hallelujahs filled the air, and after thirty minutes of truly some of the best preachin' ever, they all collapsed into one repentant mass, spread over the altar and chairs. Cindy had never ever felt so alive, so loved and loving. She had to draw a breath and regain herself. She again cried freely as she had earlier and made her way to the back office to get another cold drink.

As she walked in and closed the door behind her, she felt a warm light engulf her, a light that should have been blinding, but yet she could see. And she knew Him, for she had sung to Him,

and she felt no fear. Willingly she walked to Him and she lovingly went into His warmth.

Cindy woke to a tapping on the outer door. Opening her eyes, she looked directly at the leg of the chair beside the desk. Startled, she sat up and listened again. "Where am I? How long have I been gone?" she wondered.

Her senses began to return as she recognized familiar surroundings. The tapping was becoming annoying. She stumbled over to the door and asked, "Who's there?"

"Well it could be Santa Claus, but it ain't." said Thomas. "I'm here to walk you home or did you forget?"

"No, I didn't forget." She haltingly opened the door.

"Whoa girl, what's wrong? You okay?" Thomas grabbed Cindy as she nearly fell. "I'm a little tired. What time is it?" she asked as she held on to his arm.

"Ten P M, just like you'd asked."

"Did you see anybody or anything outside or in here when you came?" "No..., was I 'posed to?"

"You didn't see a light or nothin'?" "Not a thing. You sure you all right?"

"Yeah. Let me go tell Papa I'm leavin' and we'll go. Oh, and Thomas?" "Yeah?"

"Let's go slow."

"No problem, sugar, no problem,"

Cindy said goodnight to the choir and told her dad she'd meet him at home. Papa said goodbye and as she started to walk, a very warm feeling began to grow within her womb.