

PROLOGUE

"I.D. please", the security guard said dryly as she looked over my paper work.

I slid my driver's license and reporter I.D. through the glass opening, and proceeded through the metal detector. After making it through successfully without setting off the alarm, I was ushered to the holding cell so that I could be escorted into the visiting chambers.

I was on assignment at the Wayne County Women's Correctional Facility to interview Marion Hayes, who was sentenced to life in prison after brutally murdering her husband. I had to admit that initially I was a little bitter about the fact that I had been given this story, because to be honest, it seemed pretty mundane. But, for some reason the Woman's Lib Magazine, for which I was a reporter, just had to have the story. You hear about women offing their husbands all the time for infidelity and domestic abuse, but the further I dug into this case, the more intriguing it became.

I was very anxious to get in there and start the interview. By the time I had finished going through all of the security procedures and was escorted into the visiting room, Marion was seated at the table with her hands in her lap.

There are no words to describe my astonishment when I beheld the woman sitting in front of me. Even in the prison issued blue jumper she wore, she was a stunningly beautiful woman. At

just a glance, you could see that she was a woman of strength and pride just from her posture. Her face held a certain hardness that was very intimidating, and her eyes gleamed with wisdom of life experiences.

I took a deep breath as I approached the table and extended my hand to introduce myself.

"Ms. Hayes, I am Vanessa Jackson," I began, "and I am very pleased to meet you. I would also like to thank you for granting me this interview."

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Jackson," she replied lifting her hands slightly to acknowledge my gesture and show that she was unable to shake my hand because chain linked handcuffs prevented her from doing so.

"Before we begin, I wanted to ask why you granted this interview to Woman's Lib after so long? They have been trying to get to you for a very long time," I inquired.

She looked earnestly at me and simply stated, "Well, sometimes you just need to get things off your chest, ya know?"

"Yes, I do," I admitted. "Where shall we begin?" I asked, as I laid my tape recorder on the table.

"The beginning is always best," she responded sadly.

Chapter 1

"And so my story begins," Marion said.

When I was eleven years old, my brother Chad and I were sent to an orphanage after both of our parents were killed in a car accident. We didn't have any close relatives that were willing to take us in, and our parents moved around so much that they never had a chance to make any friends who would be willing to step in and take on that type of responsibility. So it was off to the orphanage for us and it was as simple as that.

My brother was five at that time, and even before the time of my parents passing; he was everything to me. I loved my brother more than life. We only had each other. Our parents were not the loving or doting parents that some children are blessed with. My mother was, you may as well say, a harlot and my father was a flat out drunk. So, I ended up with the responsibility of taking care of my brother all of the time since they were always partying.

I was the one that fed him, read him stories, and tucked him in at night. In his eyes our mother was just a figure that passed through to bark out orders and sleep off hangovers everyday. I was his Sissy.

The orphanage in and of itself wasn't really all that bad. We ate three square meals a day and had a warm place to sleep at night. Other than the fact I had to whoop a little ass every now and then,

to show the other girls that I wasn't just a pretty face, it was ok. Most days me and Chad would keep to ourselves and I would just do my best to keep him entertained.

Then it happened. The Epps' came into the picture and little did we know that our lives would take an unexpected turn for the worse.

Michael and Janelle Epps were not able to have children of their own, so they decided that they wanted to be foster parents. They were a great looking couple. He was well over six feet tall with a muscular build and she was about five-foot-seven with shoulder length brown hair.

When they walked in Ms. Tinsley, the head mistress, gave them a tour of the facility and all while they were walking through, Mr. Epps had his eye on me the whole time. I thought my mind was playing tricks on me so I tried not to pay him any attention, but I became very uncomfortable all of a sudden so I took Chad to our room to play a board game.

After that, a week or so went by and Ms. Tinsley called me into her office and told me to have a seat. I sat down apprehensively, as she closed the door and tried to figure out what she could possibly want with me. I tried very hard to be invisible because I figured if nobody noticed me, then they would just leave me and my brother alone.

"Marion, I have some very good news for you," she began and paused long enough to see what affect her words were having on me. "There is a nice couple that wants to take you in."

"Why...I mean, that's ok. I'm fine right here," I said nervously.

"Why, Marion, don't you want to have parents and a nice home to live in? I thought this would make you happy. Do you know how many kids in this place would love to have this opportunity?" she asked.

"No," I stated emphatically, "and what about Chad? I ain't going nowhere without my brother."

"That goes without saying, sweetheart. They want to take you and your brother, and I apologize for not being clear about that," she said gently.

"I didn't mean to upset you, I thought this would make you happy. Could we at least set up a meeting? And then you can make your decision from there. Ok?"

"I guess," I replied.

"Good. I'll set it up for the day after next. How's that?" she asked.

"Fine, I guess," I said though I was very unsure of myself.

That night I couldn't sleep. I was torn between wanting a storybook family and not wanting to be disappointed. I had already had parents and as far as I was concerned, I was doing just fine without them. At the same time, I wanted a mother for me, and a father for Chad. I could see myself going to the big shopping malls with a mother who lavished me with expensive gifts and a father who would take Chad to little league games.

Ultimately, I decided that I owed it to my little brother to at least give it a shot.

Chapter 2

Today was the big day, and all I could do was lie in bed dreading the events to come. I rolled over to check on Chad in the next bed and he was still sound asleep, so I crept into the bathroom to wash my face. As I looked into the mirror, I said a quick prayer and asked God to please let this be a good thing, and to please protect me and my little brother. We hadn't asked for much in life, so I didn't think it was an unreasonable request to put in.

After I finished getting dressed, I woke Chad up and helped him get ready. Once we were both ready, we went downstairs for breakfast. The moment we sat down at the table, we were greeted a bunch of heated glares from the other children, who were jealous that we had potential parents and they didn't. I didn't care.

We barely had a chance to finish our food before Ms. Tinsley came in to let us know that the Epps' had arrived. She led us to her office where they were waiting and ushered us in like we were her prize show dogs. "Mr. & Mrs. Epps, I would like you to meet Marion and Chad."

"We are so happy to meet you, Marion and Chad," said Mrs. Epps with a big smile on her face.

"Yes," Mr. Epps chimed in, "we sure are pleased to meet you both."

"Thank you," I replied uneasily.

“Ok then, I will leave you all to talk and get to know each other better,” said Ms. Tinsley, as she stepped out and closed the door behind her.

I took Chad’s hand and led him to the couch on the other side of the room and sat down. All four of us just sat staring at each other uncomfortably, until finally I was unable to stand it any longer.

“Why do you want us?” I blurted out.

“Well,” Mrs. Epps began, “we’re not able to have children of our own and we have always wanted children to love. We have a great big house and no one to share it with.”

“Oh,” I said staring at the floor.

“Marion,” she began, “I can tell that you take very good care of your little brother.”

“Yes, I do.”

“You are both very lucky to have each other. We would love to have the chance to give you the life that you deserve,” she said walking over to kneel down in front of us, “I know all about the loss of your parents and we just want to give you something in return for giving us a chance to share in your lives, “ she continued, as she hugged Chad and kissed his cheek.

That was the first of many lies to come, but hell, she had me convinced. In spite of myself I felt a flicker of hope ignite in my heart. I looked over at Chad and he was so enthralled in her words and promises that his little face just lit up. It was then that I made up my mind to give them a chance.

We talked a little more and before we knew it, Ms. Tinsley had returned to see what would become of our little meeting.

“So, how are we doing in here?” she asked.

“Fine, just fine. I think we’re going to have ourselves a little family,” said Mr. Epps happily.

“That’s wonderful,” said Ms. Tinsley clapping her hands together, “Marion is that ok with you?”

“Yes,” I said.

And that was that. It took less than two weeks for the paperwork to get finalized and we were out of there. It was a little less than two months until my twelfth birthday in September and I felt very optimistic about my new future. Boy was I in for a rude awakening.

We moved in with the Epps’ in the middle of July. The first six weeks were more than I could have imagined they would be. First off, the house was a big colonial style brick home on the upper scale side of Detroit. I found out that Mr. Epps was a foreman at the Ford Motor plant, and Mrs. Epps was a domestic engineer (as she liked to call it; a house wife is what I liked to call it.) Apparently, Mr. Epps made more than enough to provide a comfortable living for the both of them.

Chad and I both got our own rooms, which were right across the hall from each other. That alone would take some getting used to because we had never slept in separate rooms before. Granted, it would be a nice change for me to have some privacy, but I knew it would take some time for him to get used to it.

Then, they took us shopping for school clothes at the K-Mart. You could have hit us in the head with a sack of nickels and we wouldn't have felt it we were so happy. We had never been shopping for ourselves before for new clothes that were in style, or so we thought. All we ever got were Salvation Army hand-me-downs from our parents and state issued essentials at the orphanage.

After a full day of shopping, Chad and I were exhausted. It was late when we got home and Chad was getting sleepy. So, I went into his room to get him situated like I usually did when Mrs. Epps came in suddenly and bumped me aside so that she could tuck Chad into bed.

"Alright now, baby, don't you worry about anything. Mommy is here now and everything is ok," she crooned, as she kissed him goodnight.

I wanted to cuss her out so bad, but instead I bit my tongue so hard that I almost right through it. This woman was trippin- hard. I didn't say a word, rather I just stood there fuming as I watched her cuddle my brother like he was a love-starved puppy.

After she finished, she got up and ushered me out of the room and into the hallway. Once she closed the door, she turned to me with a smile on her face and said, "Marion, you don't have to worry about tucking Chad in anymore. I'm his mother now and I can take care of all that, ok?"

"But..." I began.

"Good! I'm glad we understand each other! Goodnight, sweetheart," she said, as she hugged me and then trotted off down the hall to her bedroom.

All I could do was stand there in shock with my mouth wide open. I was pissed off and wondering what the hell I had gotten myself into. My first thought was to grab my brother and get the hell out of there. I had been taking care of Chad all his life and I wasn't about to turn that responsibility over to a complete stranger, who I was starting to suspect was just a little off her rocker. Then I calmed myself down and tried to think rationally.

"Maybe it's not so bad...I'm too old to be tucking my brother in anyway," I told myself, but I wasn't really convinced.

And then again maybe I was really over reacting. I chose to go with that thought because I didn't want to believe that I had made anything but a good decision for my brother and me to come here. So I pushed it out of my mind and went to sleep in my new bed. I would learn soon enough, that my first instinct was usually the correct one.

Chapter 3

A few more weeks passed and my twelfth birthday came and went. They took me to a place called Boblo, and I experienced my first boat ride. The boat took us to an island that had an amusement park and we had a blast. We rode all the rides, and Mr. Epps brought us all kinds of junk food and gave us money to play the games. Mrs. Epps doted on Chad and nit-picked me as usual. I really couldn't understand what her problem was, but she seemed to have a real problem with me ever since the day she demanded that I not tuck Chad in anymore. But, I still had fun in spite of her.

Our life at home was pretty bleak while Mr. Epps was at work, because he was the one who liked to do things. When he was away, all Mrs. Epps did was sleep, drink wine, cuddle Chad, and pick on me.

It was, "Marion, do this. Marion, do that." or "Chad come here and give Mommy a kiss. Oh Chad, this or that." It was really sickening. It was almost like she was competing with me. And the weird thing was that Chad was different somehow. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but it was there just the same. I would ask him what was wrong and he would just shrug his shoulders and say nothing.

Finally, the time came to enroll in school. We would be attending the Detroit Public Schools. We were tested for placement and Chad would attend Walker Elementary for first grade (he would be six in November) and I was going to Jefferson

Middle School for sixth grade. Classes were scheduled to begin the following week.

As I was leaving the counseling office with Mrs. Epps and my new counselor, to take a tour of the school to see where my classes would be, that's when I met him for the first time. His name was Marshall Washington and he was beautiful. I was only twelve, but I swear that when he looked at me and smiled for the first time, I thought my heart would break. He had hazel eyes and light brown curly hair.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," I replied. All of a sudden my mouth became very dry.

"I'm Marshall, are you new?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. Then we just stood there with him staring at me and me staring at the ground.

"Come along, Marion," Mrs. Epps snapped.

"Uh...I have to go," I stuttered.

"Well it was nice meeting you," he said, as he walked into the office.

I don't remember anything about the tour that I got that day because I swear I could not get that boy's face out of my head. I wasn't one that could be considered boy crazy; hell, I had never even paid attention to any boy other than to fight before. But this was different and it came out of nowhere. I was really hoping that I would see him again or that maybe he would even be in one of my classes. Only time would reveal and classes were only a few days away.

On the drive home, I was still day dreaming in my own little world when suddenly I felt my brother tugging on my arm.

"SISSY, WILL YOU TAKE ME TO THE PARK?" he yelled.

"Yes, Chad, dang calm down!" I snapped snatching my arm away.

"You watch your tone with him, young lady," she said to me. "Chad, mommy will take you to the park. Would you like that?"

He shrunk down in his seat and poked his lip out.

"I'll take him, Mrs. Epps, he likes for me to play tag with him."

She looked into the rear view mirror and saw Chad's expression and said, "Very well, I suppose."

So when we got home, Chad jumped out of the car and grabbed my hand and I took him to the park. While I pushed him on the merry-go-round, I asked him why he didn't want Mrs. Epps to take him and he just looked down at the ground.

"Chad, do you hear me talking to you?" I asked in my grown up voice.

"I wanted you to bring me that's why," he shot back.

"Is that all?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Ok, then. Are you excited about your new school?" I asked trying to change the subject.

"No," he said, "I don't like school. The other kids always make fun of me."

"Well, you tell them little bastards that if they mess with you, then your sister will come up there and whoop all they little asses. Ok?"

He smiled at that and said, "Ok."

When we got home about an hour later Mr. and Mrs. Epps were sitting in the living room. He had just gotten home from work and she was sipping on her wine, as usual.

"Hey, kids," he greeted us with a big smile, "how would you like to go out for dinner tonight?"

"No," said Mrs. Epps cutting him off, "we are not going anywhere. I cooked dinner and we are not going to waste good money when we have food right here."

Mr. Epps just looked away in an effort to avoid causing her to get upset.

"Mike and Chad, you boys go ahead and wash up for dinner, Marion and I will get everything ready," she said.

"Come along, Marion and you can set the table."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, as I followed her into the kitchen.

I went directly to the silverware drawer and started to gather up what I needed and when I turned around-

WHAM! She slapped me right across my face and the silverware went flying everywhere. I looked up in shock with tears in my eyes.

"Don't you ever do that to me again!" she said in a menacing voice. "How dare you try to

override me with Chad! You don't think I see what you are doing? Trying to come between me and my son? I am his mother now, so you'd better start acting like it! This is the last time that we are going to have this discussion!"

Clearly this bitch had lost her mind. My natural reaction was to ball up my fist and just start swinging, but I was really scared of what might happen next. This woman was crazy. She had really lost her mind!

"Are we clear?" she asked. No words would come, so I just stared at her. "Good," she said and continued to fix dinner as if nothing happened.

Somehow I managed to make it through dinner and then I went upstairs to my room. As I sat on the bed, I began to wonder what I had gotten myself into. I tried to tell myself that maybe she was just having a bad day, and not to think anything of it but I knew that wasn't the case. I made a promise to myself right then and there to just bide my time, do what she said and try not to make her angry, because I had no clue what this woman was capable of.

On the brighter side of things, I was starting school next week and with any luck Marshall Washington would be in one of my classes. That thought alone was enough to spark hope in my heart.

Thankfully, I made it through the weekend, and the first day of school finally arrived.

"Come on, Chad!" I yelled up the stairs, "we're going to miss the bus!"

"I don't wanna go!" he screamed back at me.

I stomped up the stairs and pushed his door open only to find him sitting on his bed, with his arms folded across his little chest and tears streaming down his cheeks.

"You'd better get dressed and come on! Why are you crying?" I asked. I was really irritated that he was taking so long.

"I ain't going to first grade and you can't make me," he stated matter-of-factly.

"Oh, yeah?" I asked, as I started toward him, but then I thought better of it and decided to take a more diplomatic approach.

"I wonder what all those kids are gonna say when they see you playing outside and don't see you at school? They're gonna come up to you and ask you why you don't go to school and you'll have to tell them that you're a big baby. What a shame."

"I AM NOT A BABY!" he yelled.

"I know that, but how will they know if you don't go to school and show them you're a big boy?" I asked, with fake wonder in my voice.

By that time he was off the bed and pulling his pants on.

"I'm not no baby," he muttered, as he finished getting dressed.

"Ok, I'll be downstairs waiting for you."

By the time I ran downstairs to grab our lunches and my backpack, he was waiting for me at the front door. We had just made it to the bus stop a few minutes before it pulled up. Chad and I found a

seat and when we got to the school I walked him to his class and then ran next door to the middle school.

I found my homeroom class with no problem, and as I walked in, I couldn't help but notice how many of the other girls were pointing and snickering at me. My clothes, although a million times better than what I used to wear, still were not the name brand stylish clothes that most of them were wearing.

"Nice shoes," said a light skinned girl with shoulder length black hair, "I'm guessing K-Mart blue light special?"

"No," I replied coolly, "your mamma's closest."

She rolled her eyes as if I was unworthy of any more of her attention, so I rolled mine back and continued on to my seat. I was pissed but I was determined not to get in trouble on the first day of school. Just then I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"Don't pay her no mind," the voice said, "Crystal is just a rich little black girl, who doesn't get enough attention from her daddy."

"Shut up, Marshall!" The girl shot back.

My heartbeat sped up immediately, and I had to remember to breathe evenly. I turned around and there he was; Marshall Washington looking as handsome as ever.

"I don't remember getting your name," he said.

"Mm..Marion," I stuttered.

"Welcome to Jefferson, Marion, and don't let these jealous hoes around here get to you," he whispered.

"Thanks," I said turning quickly to the front in an attempt to keep him from seeing me blush.

After that, the rest of the day seemed to fly by. I continued to get icy glares from Crystal and her clique but I didn't care. If they kept it up, her and all of her bitches would be picking teeth off the floor. I had a very low tolerance for people trying to bully me, even at the age of twelve. There was very little in the world that I was afraid of, and girls my age definitely wasn't one of them.

I collected my homework and bookbag from my locker and made my way to the elementary campus to pick up my brother.

"Hey, Marion, wait up!"

I turned around to see Marshall running across the grass to catch up with me.

"Do you mind if I walk you home?" he asked.

"If you want to," I said shrugging my shoulders to make it seem like I wasn't pressed one way or the other. Inside I was doing cartwheels.

"Ok, I'll save you a seat on the bus," he called, as he ran off to the bus parking lot.

I found Chad and almost ripped his arm out of the socket because I was practically dragging him to get the bus. By the time the bus pulled up to our stop, Chad had already made himself Marshall's best buddy. The whole ride home, Marshall listened patiently to Chad ramble on about his day at school. He even asked him questions to make him feel important. I was very impressed.

When the bus finally got to our stop, I asked him, "Why weren't you on the bus this morning?"

"My mom had to drop me off this morning because I had a doctor appointment," he replied.

"Oh."

"I like your brother, he's a smart kid,"

"He's ok as far as little brothers go. I wouldn't trade 'em," I said, as I tried to suppress a grin.

"So, where do you live?" he asked.

"On Archdale," I responded. "Where do you stay?"

"Right around the block, on Parker. Where are you from?" he asked.

I was silent for a moment. Did I want to tell him the truth, or make up some elaborate fairytale existence? I decided that it was best to tell the truth, especially since Chad was right there. He was bound to blurt out the facts, if he heard me telling anything other than that.

"I am from Detroit, but I used to stay at the orphanage on the other side of town. Our parents were killed in a car accident."

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that," he said sincerely.

"It's ok. It's not like we're missing out on anything. Our parents weren't the most loving," I told him. I was kind of embarrassed to say it out loud, but it was the truth.

After about ten minutes, we came to our house. In that time I had already made up my mind that this guy was special. Even though he was only

twelve, he seemed more mature than the other guys my age at the orphanage.

"Well, this is our stop. I guess I'll see you around"

"Yep, I'll come by and pick you guys up tomorrow. Bye, Chad!" he called, as he began to jog down the street.

I don't think I even touched the ground as I went up the porch steps. We walked into the house and I didn't even take my coat off good before Chad was yelling, "Marion has a boyfriend," at the top of his lungs.

"Shut up, brat!" I said, as I tried to grab him before Mrs. Epps could hear the racket. But I was too late.

"What's going on in here?" she inquired.

"Marion has a BOYFRIEND," Chad taunted in a sing-a-song tone.

"Is that so?" she said, with one eyebrow raised.

"No, ma'am," I replied nervously, "I made a new friend at school and his name is Marshall."

"He walked us home! I like him!" Chad happily volunteered.

"That's wonderful, sweetie," she said and she bent down to give him a hug and a kiss.

"Now, Marion, I won't tolerate any mess do you understand? This boy better just be a friend. I won't have no sluts livin' in my house, you get me."

"Yes, ma'am," I said as I tried to hold back my anger. I simply picked up my bookbag and made

my way upstairs. The whole way up I was running through my mind all of the different things I could have said to her; like where to go and how to get there. I was really starting to hate her. My only saving grace was Mr. Epps, who really seemed to care about me and Chad, but he was always working. It made me sick sometimes because I was always worried and feeling like I had to watch my back.

I went to bed that night and prayed for God to watch over me and help me to stay out of her way.