

Chapter 1

Egypt rose to the sound of her alarm clock ringing. She couldn't believe it was time to start another day. She sat on the side of her bed and said a prayer for God's strength and guidance. She slid her feet into her slippers and padded down the hall toward her mother's room to determine if she was home. Egypt heard her leave the night before but didn't remember hearing her return. It really didn't matter if she was there or not because the outcome was the same for Egypt. She was responsible for seeing that her siblings got to wherever they needed to be. She did want to insure her mother was safe before she went to school. Slowly opening her mother's bedroom door, she realized it was empty, causing Egypt a bit of anxiety. Egypt turned and went to her room to wake up her little brother and sister.

Her sister, Shae, was seven years old and the most difficult to wake up, so Egypt started with her.

"Shae, wake up. It's time for school."

Shae responded by grumbling something about still being sleepy. She turned over, putting her thumb in her mouth, and went back to sleep. Egypt's tactic was to use Shae being ticklish to awaken her. Shae laughed and began to fight off her big sister.

"Get up, little girl. Do what you need to do in the bathroom. I'll come in the kitchen to fix your breakfast. You can pick what you want to eat."

"Okay!" Shae being able to pick her breakfast always got her moving a little quicker.

Egypt then jiggled Corey to awaken him. As usual, the three-year-old popped up out of his sleep like a jack-in-the-box. She laid him back down to check his pull-up for moisture. Egypt realized she would have to bathe Corey before they left the apartment though he'd had a bath the night before. She ran the water for his birdbath while she fixed Shae's chosen breakfast. Within an hour, everyone was ready to go.

She took Corey to Miss Smith next door and begged her to watch him until her mother returned or until she got out of school. Miss Smith obviously wanted to say no, but couldn't bear to inconvenience Egypt any more than the seventeen-year-old high school senior already was. She agreed to help Egypt once again and offered to feed the family after school if their

mother wasn't home yet. Egypt boarded the bus that would take her and Shae to school. She and Shae read to each other until they reached the stop closest to Shae's school. She walked her little sister inside, then walked the few remaining blocks to her school.

Though Egypt had no children, she felt like she had three: Shae, Corey, and her mother. Egypt didn't complain though because she knew they all needed her. Her mother, Carolyn, was only fifteen when she had Egypt and she hadn't had a chance to be the carefree teenager she should have been at that age. Grandma Peete didn't allow her daughter to shirk her responsibility where Egypt was concerned. Parties, dates, ballgames, proms and the like were out. Grandma Peete said Mommy had given up her rights to all of that when she had the two minutes of fun with their Poppy, Desmond. So, Mommy seems to be having her fun now.

Egypt sat in her normal seat in her homeroom class. After announcements and attendance, the bell rang and the class left to begin their first subject of the day. By the end of the day, Egypt was exhausted. Not only had she stayed up late the previous night doing homework and studying for tests, Corey had been fussy and didn't want to settle down. Getting up this morning, shuffling everyone out of the door and making it through the school day were particularly tiring. Egypt had fallen asleep a few times during school. Her prayers were answered when the school allowed an early dismissal for Shae without too much fuss. She prayed her mother was home so she could catch a nap before she began her studies for the evening.

When Egypt reached her block, she noticed Miss Smith standing on her stoop apparently waiting for her. When Miss Smith noticed Egypt coming down the street, she went inside and returned with Corey.

"Hi, Miss Smith. Hey, Corey. Mommy didn't make it home yet?"

"Yes, she's in there. I saw her stumble down the street hours ago. She didn't look like she would be able to care for this little boy so I just kept him with me. I can't talk long because I have an appointment to get to."

"Thank you for watching Corey for me. I don't know what I would do if you weren't willing to watch him."

“I’m doing it because of you. Let me tell you a little something, young lady. Shae and Corey are not your responsibility. Your mother needs to step up and do what mothers do. The next time I see Carolyn I’m going to remind her that she needs to grow up and take care of her children. I know you have dreams Egypt. I know you have something you want to do with your life besides caring for your family and you should. You’re going to have to get free of this load so you can live your own life.”

Egypt walked the two doors to their home with Shae and Corey. She looked down at the two and realized how much she loved and cared for them. She couldn’t imagine loving her own children any more than these two. Leaving them in the sole care of her mother just didn’t seem like the right thing to do.

When they arrived at home, they all went to their mother’s bedroom excited to see her. The children ran into the room and jumped on her bed. Groggily, their mother turned over and glared at her offspring. It was obvious she didn’t want to be disturbed. Corey, unaware of his mother’s mood, sat on her, craving her attention. Suddenly, she pushed him off her, letting out a grunt that further confirmed her displeasure revealing a wet spot. Apparently, Corey’s overflowing pull-up needed changing.

“Get up off me, Corey!” Carolyn yelled as she pushed her little boy away from her. The little boy moved away from his mother. His downturned lips saddened Egypt.

“Corey needs his pull-up changed. That’s all.”

“Well, why are you telling me about it? Get him cleaned up while I take a shower. Change my sheets while you’re at it. He probably got those wet too,” Mommy said as she left her bedroom without even acknowledging Shae who was walking alongside her mother.

“Mommy, you want to see what I made in school today?”

“No, I don’t have time right now. Show it to Egypt.”

“I have studying to do tonight. I can’t watch Corey and Shae.”

“Well, you better find time to watch them because I think I have an appointment tonight. I don’t know why you’re studying so hard anyway. You’re not going to need that education. You’re going to do what people in our family have always done.”

“I don’t want to go on welfare.”

“If your daddy would do better by y’all, we wouldn’t have to be on welfare.”

Egypt lay in bed that night seemingly unable to sleep. Egypt’s thoughts overshadowed the soft snores of her siblings. Her mother’s words kept running rampant through her mind. As miserable as they were, why would her mother act like it’s okay to live like this? This was no way to live. Egypt had a desire for a better life. She’d never shared it with her mother because she didn’t think she would understand. She would just make her dream seem silly.

Egypt dreamt of becoming a world-renowned journalist. She imagined herself traveling the world to exotic locales looking for and reporting the truth around the globe. She would be a cast member of a nationally televised news program. That’s what she dreamt of doing when she had a few moments to herself.

The reality was she lived in a run-down two-bedroom house with her mother and two siblings. Truthfully, she was the one who was raising her little brother and sister. Her mother was missing in action most of the time. Egypt struggled to find time, space, and the quiet she needed to study as a high school student. How would she ever do it for college courses? The goal seemed unreachable based on her current circumstances and she didn’t see where any of it would change soon.

Her mother’s words about their father also spent some time galloping through her psyche. Egypt decided the next time she saw him, she would ask him why he didn’t support them as a man should. He always spoke to Egypt about what a good man looks like and that was one of the things he mentioned. He would always say, “A good man is a provider!”

His second family lived in a five-bedroom house when they only needed four. They traveled on nice vacations, went out to dinner most of the time, and always had the latest and greatest of everything. Her father did have the three of them over sometimes, but their visitations with him were anything but consistent. It seemed unfair for them to struggle and his new family to be living the high life. Yes, this was something Egypt definitely would confront.