



G L O R Y

U N B O U N D

D E B O R A H L . K I N G

INTERLUDE — JUNE 1972

Four days before her sixth birthday, Glory Hallelujah Bishop knew a whole lot of things. As a matter of fact, she knew more things than anybody else in her kindergarten class. She knew all her letters, and she knew C-A-T didn't say "cuh-at"—it said "cat," like a real cat that said "meow." And S-T-O-P didn't say "stop sign" or "red light" or "stop it" or "freeze"—it was plain old "stop" and meant *stop* just like the word said. And Glory knew not just school things—she knew important things, too, like how to spell and write her whole name and her mama's name and her daddy's name and her address and her phone number and her mama's phone number at work and the license number on her daddy's truck and the phone number on the door on her daddy's truck.

But that day, the most important thing Glory knew was that weddings were dumb and wedding ladies were crybabies and wedding boys were dumb and flower girls were the biggest, meanest dummies in the world. They were so mean and dumb in their big, dumb, fluffy dresses with their dumb ribbons, throwing their dumb flowers—and they were all doing it wrong anyway—that God was going to get them and make them ugly one day because it was a sin to act pretty in church.

Glory stood on the balcony, looking down on the empty church sanctuary where that day's wedding had taken place. The only kids allowed down there were wedding kids, so Glory and the other children had watched from the balcony. Everybody said it was happy, but almost all the ladies had been crying. Glory hoped there wouldn't be another wedding the next day. It seemed like lately, every time they came to church, there was a wedding. There'd been two the day

before, and her mother had sung in the choir and cleaned up both times, and today after church there was another one, and her mother was *still* in there, talking and cleaning up.

“Hey. Whatcha doin’?”

Glory sighed. “Nothin’.” She glanced out of the corner of her eye but didn’t look directly at the boy on his hands and knees beside her. Josiah Jackson wasn’t one of the wedding kids because he was a *bad boy*. He always had to sit out in the hall because he acted up in Sunday school, and his mom or dad always had to come and get him out of the nursery during church service. Sometimes, they even had to take him into the bathroom to *straighten him out*. When he stood up beside Glory, close enough that their shoulders touched, she moved over a step.

“How come you wasn’t a flower girl?”

“I don’t wanna be a flower girl.” Glory wouldn’t say out loud that they were mean dummies because she didn’t want God to get her and make her ugly for saying mean things in church.

“Flower girls are stupid anyway. Trina is the stupidest.”

Glory’s eyes went wide, and she gaped at the very bad boy standing beside her. “You can’t say *stupid* in church!” Glory whispered as loudly as she could. “God is gonna get you for saying that!”

“Well, you just said it!” Josiah didn’t whisper at all. “Is God gonna get you?”

Glory turned away from the bad boy and took a giant step to the side. Of course, Josiah followed, so she took another step and another. After many more steps, they’d moved almost halfway around the balcony that encircled the sanctuary, and their battle of wills had turned to giggles. The game paused when a teenage couple walked into the sanctuary, looking around. Glory and Josiah watched the pair hugging and kissing. Well, at least, Josiah watched. Glory covered her eyes when the kissing started.

“It’s okay. You can look now,” Josiah whispered.

Glory peeked through her fingers. The teenagers were still kissing. She covered her eyes again and heard a thump as Josiah fell over, laughing. She peeked again to see the teenagers looking and pointing in their direction. The teenagers laughed and waved as they walked out, the girl with her arm around the boy and the boy with his hand on the girl’s bottom. The girl tried to push the boy's hand away, and he whacked her. The girl just laughed. Glory decided teenagers were dumb too.

“Hey, c’mon!” Josiah said suddenly. “I wanna show you a trick!”

Glory watched the bad boy *running* down the spiral staircase.

“It’s not bad—I promise! Hurry up!”

She followed him but didn’t run. Even though she wanted to see the trick, following Josiah had gotten other kids in trouble, and watching him do a trick in church was probably a bad idea. At the bottom of the stairs, Josiah gave her a handful of flowers that had been left lying around from the wedding.

“Wait right here,” he said. “I’ll tell you when.”

Glory watched him running again to the front of the sanctuary and shook her head. No matter what the trick was, she was not going to run in church.

“Okay, you can come here now!” Josiah called. “Bring the flowers too!”

Glory looked around and then walked to meet Josiah. She wondered if she looked like the flower girls walking up the aisle, even though her dress was yellow and she didn’t have ribbons and she wasn’t acting pretty.

At the front, Josiah bounced on his toes, grinning. “Okay. Do you like ice cream?”

Glory scrunched her eyebrows and looked at him. She wasn't going to be tricked into saying a bad word in church, so she just nodded.

"I promise it's not a bad trick." Josiah laughed. "You hafta talk. Do you like ice cream?"

Glory sighed, shifting her weight from one foot to the other. "Yes."

"No, you don't." Josiah said

"Huh? Yes, I do."

"Nope. You doon't," Josiah sang.

"I do!" Glory said again as loudly as she dared.

Josiah broke into a wider grin. "I do too. Okay. Here's the good part. Close your eyes."

Glory folded her arms and stared at him.

"C'mon. It's not gonna be bad. I promise." He smiled at her again. "Trust me."

Glory took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She felt Josiah's hands on her shoulders, and then it was over so fast she wasn't sure what had happened. Her eyes flew open, and her hand went to her mouth. She stared at the grinning boy in front of her. "Josiah, you just kissed me?"

"Yup!" He smiled like he'd just done the best trick ever. "Now we're married."

Glory gasped. "No, we're not!"

"Uh-huh." Josiah laughed. "This is our wedding. We said I do, and you let me kiss you. That means we're married!"

Glory looked at the flowers in her hand and dropped them like they burned. "You tricked me! You take it back right now!"

"Nope, Mrs. Glory." Josiah picked up the flowers. "It's too late. You're married to me now." He offered her the flowers again, still smiling like he'd won.

“No! I’m not married to you, Josiah!” Glory pushed him down, and she didn’t care if it was mean. She didn’t even care if God was going to get her for it. There was no way she was going to be married to a bad boy like Josiah. When he didn’t stop laughing and kept calling her *Mrs. Glory*, she hit him in the head with the flowers, and when he kept laughing, she bent down and hit him in the arm with her fist, and when he still wouldn’t stop laughing, she sat on him and kept hitting him. Josiah shielded his face with his arms, and Glory hit him everywhere she could, demanding that he take back their marriage until she felt herself being pulled off a laughing Josiah by the teenage boy they’d seen earlier.

“How y’all gon’ be fighting in church?” The teenager held Glory up by her wrists so her toes were barely touching the floor.

Josiah sat on the floor, leaning back on his elbows, smiling up at her. “Sometimes married people fight.” He shrugged.

“We are not married, Josiah!” Glory didn’t care about being quiet in church anymore.

“We just got married today.” Josiah stood up and dusted himself off. “Now she mad.”

“Married, huh?” The teenager laughed. “I don’t know, li’l man. This one might be too much for you.”

Glory was so angry she had to fight back tears. Struggling against the smirking teenager holding her wrist, she kicked at Josiah. “Let me go, you mean dummy!” She pinched the teenager, and he grabbed both of her wrists in one hand.

Josiah was starting to look not so happy.

“Li’l man, if you wanna be married to this woman, you gon’ need to control her, or you might get hurt.”

Glory kicked the teenager as hard as she could.

“Okay, let her go now,” Josiah said. “We’ll stop fighting, right, Glory?”

“I’m not married to you! Leave me—”

The hard smack on her bottom stunned her but not as much as the roar that came out of Josiah as he rammed his head into the teenager’s belly, sending everybody tumbling to the floor.

“Don’t you ever hit my wife!” Josiah kicked and pummeled the overwhelmed teenager while Glory scrambled to her feet. “Glory, run!”

Glory took off running and didn’t stop until she reached the back of the sanctuary. She turned to see the teenager on his knees, laughing, and Josiah using karate moves just like the robots on TV. “God is gonna get you for tricking me, Josiah!” she yelled as she climbed the stairs to go find her mother.

AT HOME, SEATED AT the kitchen table, Glory watched her mother spoon and stir the brown chocolate powder into a tall glass of milk. After church, after the walk home, after changing clothes and eating dinner, mother and daughter had sat down to enjoy a dessert of flower-shaped butter cookies and, for Glory, a glass of chocolate milk. Her mother, Mary, had a cup of coffee and a cigarette. Glory dipped a cookie into her milk and counted to one—any longer, and the cookie would fall apart and sink, leaving muck at the bottom of her glass. Her mother sipped her coffee and took long, slow puffs on her cigarette.

“That was sho’ a nice wedding today, wasn’t it?” Mary said, blowing smoke into the air. “Jamette was so lovely. They gon’ have a blessed life.” She sipped her coffee.

“Mama, what happens when you get married?” Glory asked. “I mean after the wedding part. What do you do next?”

Mary coughed and put down her coffee cup. A puff of smoke blew out of her nose. “Well, baby, after the wedding...” She sipped her coffee again. “They start married life. They live together and have a family.”

“So they hafta live together to be married?” *Aha... I can't be married to Josiah because we don't live together.*

“Well... sometimes married people don't live together. Like, your daddy mostly lives in his truck, but we're certainly married. His job makes him be gone a lot. And Jamette's new husband is going away to the army, so they're not gon' live together. She's gon' stay with her mama, but they still married.”

Glory's heart sank. She dipped another cookie and forgot to count, realizing too late that she had only half a cookie in her hand. “What do you hafta do when you're married?”

Mary sighed a little and took a deep drag on her cigarette. “Well, baby, Bible says husband take care of the wife, love her, give her what she need, protect her, teach her, make her godly. Wife obey the husband, do whatever he say, don't shame him, take care of the home, take care of the babies.”

Glory thought about Josiah, and her heart sank even further.