

## Sample Chapter: Behind Closed Doors 2: Dana's Story

### Prologue

Fear is a defense mechanism that produces a vital response to emotional and physical danger.

Walking five blocks to and from school through the dangerous ghetto would have intimidated any twelve year old, but survival was a way of life and fear was my protection. There were no immediate signs of danger during my daily journey, but I was instinctively aware of everything around me and always prepared to act accordingly. As my classmates sped by me on their colorful bicycles, I grew excited about the prospect that I might finally get one of my own for Christmas. My father gave my mom the money to purchase the bike the previous year, but she used the money to pay the electric bill—at least, that's the story she told me. When I mistakenly allowed her to see my disappointment, I received a whipping and an hour-long speech about my ungratefulness. "I feed you, and this is the thanks I get? I don't hear anyone else around here complaining and poor-mouthing," she said.

She looked at my younger sisters and my little brother for affirmation. I wanted to remind her of the fact that they had little to complain about since she gave them everything. My point was valid, but I was smart enough to know that a comment from me on the topic would result in another lashing. My sisters didn't respond to the latest outburst from my mother because they were accustomed to it. However, I could see the paralyzing fear on their little faces. At times, the verbal and physical abuse that I received from my mother had a greater impact on them than it had on me. As a coping mechanism, I learned to channel everything to a place that was beyond the realm of feeling. I no longer responded to the physical pain that my mother inflicted and it drove her crazy. The verbal abuse escalated a few notches when she realized it had a greater effect on me than her physical punishments.

This was my life for as long as I could remember, but the intensity of the abuse dramatically increased when my parents separated. I was around eight years old at the time. When I got home from school that evening, I met my father at the front door. When I noticed the suitcases and plastic bags, my heart sank. I asked him if he was leaving for good and he said yes. My mother came out of the house in a violent rage, which worsened at the sight of my tears. Her eyes narrowed and she spoke to me through clenched teeth.

“Why don’t you get your shit and go with your daddy! That’s one less mouth for me to feed. I mean it, Bernard. Take that little hussy with you!” She spoke as if her words were meant for a perfect stranger instead of her own daughter. My father dropped his bags and knelt in front of me, without so much as even a glance toward my mother. He gave me a hug and cradled my face between his hands.

“I love you, Dana. Don’t ever forget that,” he said softly. He gave me a hug and a kiss on the forehead, then turned to look at my mother for the last time. He spoke in Haitian Creole or “patois” to my mother, who was from South Louisiana. It was something my father often did to conceal his anger from me or whenever he wanted to discuss sensitive information with my mother. By now, I not only understood the language, but I spoke it fluently. Neither of my parents were aware of this. In his thick Haitian accent, he addressed my mother very calmly, but his anger was apparent.

“You’re going to burn in hell for your evil ways, Diana,” he said.

“I’ll be waiting for you when you get there,” she replied. An evil smile crossed her face before she turned and walked back into the house.

My father left that day and my entire world crumbled.

