

# ONE

## **IF THIS WAS A MOVIE, IT WOULD START THE NIGHT**

he got here, back at the beginning of August. I was trying to sleep when I heard, “Jarrett. Get up.”

It was still the middle of the night, and I probably hadn’t even been asleep for more than an hour. But my mom’s voice was getting louder and louder.

“Jarrett, you have to get up.”

I pulled the blanket over my face and tried to ignore her, but I should have known better. That never works with her. A few seconds later, she turned on the lights in my room, and it was so bright I couldn’t even take it.

I flipped over on my stomach and pressed my head into the pillow to make it all go away, but that didn’t stop her. “Jarrett, are you up? You have to wake up. The caseworker is going to be here soon, and I need you to help me get this room ready. Come on.”

I let out a long, loud groan. She wasn’t gonna leave. She wasn’t. I didn’t have a choice. I had to get up.

It wasn’t till I had slowly slid down off the top bunk that I figured out she wasn’t making any kinda sense. Get *this* room ready? *For what?*

While I stood there, not knowing what was going on, my mom was busy taking some of my magazines off the bottom bunk and putting them on the floor by the ugly, lopsided totem pole I made in fourth grade.

“Take all those dirty clothes off the chair and put them in the hamper.” The way she looked around my room with her face all scrunched up, you would have thought it was covered in rotten bodies left over after a zombie invasion. “Lawd,” she said, and her accent suddenly got thicker, so I knew she meant what she was about to say, “this room is shameful. And it stinks.”

“It’s not that bad,” I said even though it really was kinda bad that day. Well, the whole year, really.

“Hurry.” She pointed to the chair.

I grabbed all the clothes and started to walk outta my room, trying to make sure I didn’t drop anything. Then I stopped at the door. “Wait a minute. What does *my* room have to do with anything?” I waited for her to answer me, but she didn’t. She was too busy taking the sheets and everything off the bed.

I sighed real loud to get her attention. “If we’re getting a baby, I don’t think the caseworker is gonna care if my room is messed up or not.”

Still no answer. So I stomped outta the room and into the bathroom to dump all my clothes in the hamper.

My mom takes in babies, most of the time in the middle of the night. She’s a foster mother, and we get all kinda babies all the time. Sometimes they were abused or their parents didn’t take good enough care of them or something. Most of

the time they only stay with us for a little while, like a couple of days or weeks. Then they go somewhere else. We're just temporary.

What I didn't know was why my mom was putting me in the middle of it this time.

I went back to my room and stood there watching my mom fix everything up. "Can I just go back to sleep?" I asked. "I'm tired." It was exactly 12:36 in the morning. I went to bed around 10:00, but it took me a while to fall asleep. I couldn't stop thinking about everything that had happened that day, how I'd found out I was stupid. *Officially* stupid.

My mom finally looked at me. "You've been sulking around all day, Jarrett. I know you're upset, but —"

"I'm wasting my whole summer!" I said, and my voice got kinda loud, which made my mom raise her eyebrows at me.

"It's not a waste. You're learning a lot of new —"

"I'm not learning *anything*! And now that teacher doesn't even wanna let me —"

"You don't know that," Mom said. "You don't know what she and the principal were talking about."

"They were talking about *me*!"

"Well, you shouldn't have been spying on them. If you had been caught —"

"I wasn't caught," I said. "I'm never caught."

"That's enough, Jarrett," Mom said, throwing up her hands. "The caseworkers are on the way. We'll talk some more about this tomorrow."

I sighed as loud as I could. She was always doing that. Pushing me to the side for one of the babies. Nothing new about that. “Can you at least tell me what’s going on? And can you tell me what this has to do with my room because I don’t get this.”

“The agency called and they’re bringing over a baby,” she said. “A little girl. She was injured this evening and those poor kids have been in the emergency room all night.”

“There’s more than one?”

“The baby has an older brother. That’s why we need your extra bed.”

“No way!” I said. “Why does he have to — ?”

“Calm down, Jarrett.”

Easy for her to say. Why should I calm down? She wanted me to sleep in my room with some little kid I didn’t know who was probably gonna cry all night and pee in the bed. “How old is this kid anyway?” I asked.

“He’s twelve.”

My mouth flew open. “He’s *older* than *me*? That’s not even fair!”

“Relax,” she said, all calm, probably because some stranger wasn’t gonna be sleeping in *her* room. “He’s only going to be here for a day or two, until the agency can find a home that wants to take both kids and keep them together. The baby has special needs and —”

“I have special needs, too!” I practically shouted. “I *need* to have my own space and be left alone.”

